

Ex Bibris



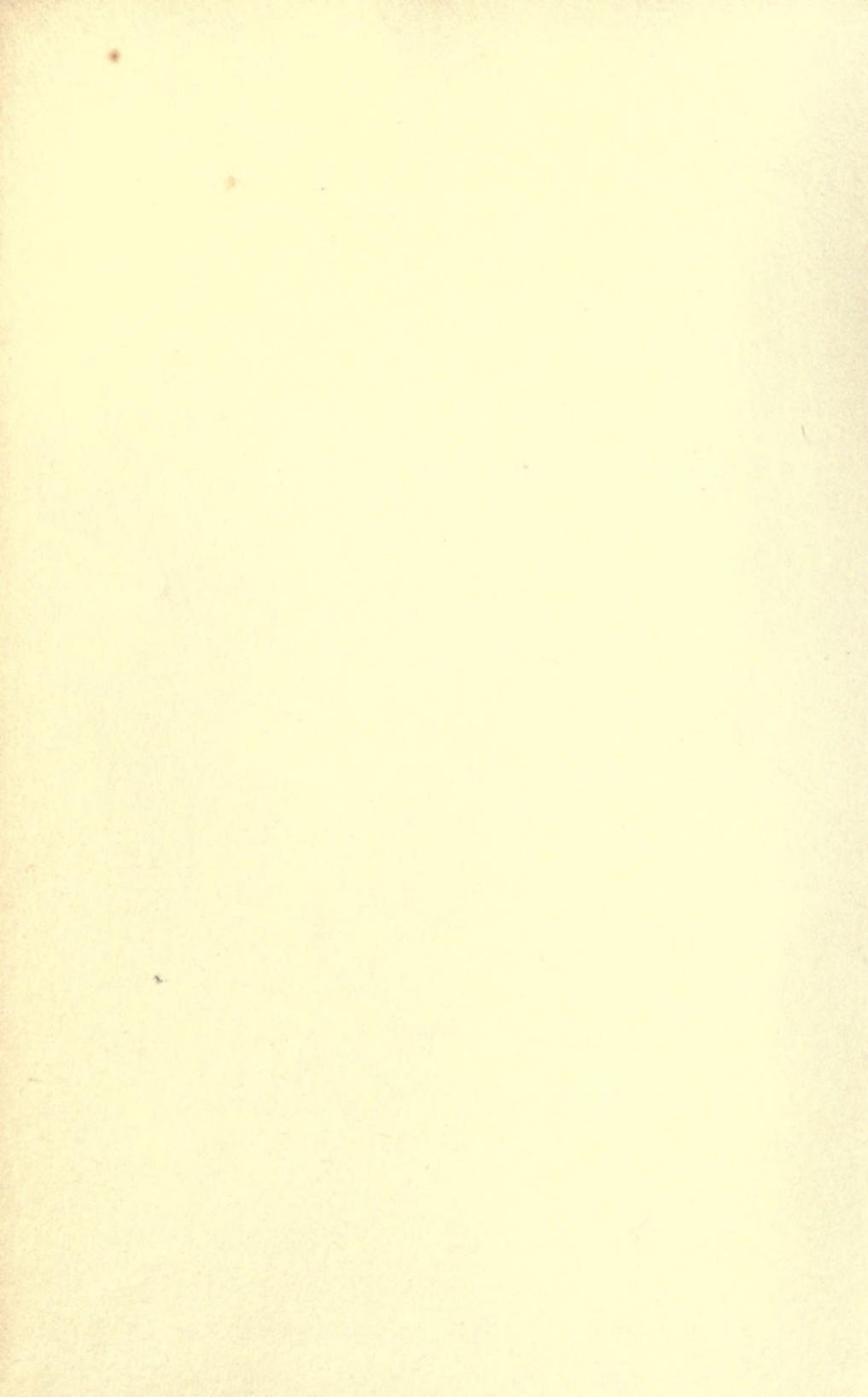
Regnold Boden

R B Boden,
Lancashire College,
Manchester.

June 1916.



PROPHECY AND POETRY



PROPHECY AND POETRY

STUDIES IN ISAIAH AND BROWNING

The Bohlen Lectures for 1909

BY

ARTHUR ROGERS

AUTHOR OF

“MEN AND MOVEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH”

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

91 AND 93 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

LONDON, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

1909

Copyright, 1909,
BY LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

To C. A. R.

2209256

THE JOHN BOHLEN LECTURESHIP

JOHN BOHLEN, who died in this city on the twenty-sixth day of April, 1874, bequeathed to trustees a fund of one hundred thousand dollars, to be distributed to religious and charitable objects in accordance with the well-known wishes of the testator.

By a deed of trust, executed June 2, 1875, the trustees under the will of Mr. Bohlen transferred and paid over to "The Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia," in trust, a sum of money for certain designated purposes, out of which fund the sum of ten thousand dollars was set apart for the endowment of THE JOHN BOHLEN LECTURESHIP, upon the following terms and conditions: —

The money shall be invested in good substantial and safe securities, and held in trust for a fund to be called The John Bohlen Lectureship, and the income shall be applied annually to the payment of a qualified person, whether clergyman or layman, for the delivery and publication of at least one hundred copies of two or more lecture sermons. These Lectures shall be delivered at such time and place, in the city of Philadelphia, as the persons nominated to appoint the lecturer shall from

viii THE JOHN BOHLEN LECTURESHIP

time to time determine, giving at least six months notice to the person appointed to deliver the same, when the same may conveniently be done, and in no case selecting the same person as lecturer a second time within a period of five years. The payment shall be made to said lecturer, after the lectures have been printed and received by the trustees, of all the income for the year derived from said fund, after defraying the expense of printing the lectures and the other incidental expenses attending the same.

The subject of such lectures shall be such as is within the terms set forth in the will of the Rev. John Bampton, for the delivery of what are known as the "Bampton Lectures," at Oxford, or any other subject distinctively connected with or relating to the Christian Religion.

The lecturer shall be appointed annually in the month of May, or as soon thereafter as can conveniently be done, by the persons who, for the time being, shall hold the offices of Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese in which is the Church of the Holy Trinity; the Rector of said Church; the Professor of Biblical Learning, the Professor of Systematic Divinity, and the Professor of Ecclesiastical History, in the Divinity School of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.

In case either of said offices are vacant the others may nominate the lecturer.

Under this trust the Reverend ARTHUR ROGERS, Rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, West Chester, Pennsylvania, was appointed to deliver the lectures for the year 1909.

P R E F A C E

A BOOK is like a sentence in that, to be complete, it must needs have both a subject and an object. I do not mean the sort of object which has to do with the public, whether it be to improve its morals or to induce it to buy the volume. But the author must have in mind the kind of people whom he would like to read his book, and the effect that he would like it to produce. The subject of this volume is sufficiently indicated by the title. It is a comparison between two great men, each of them a leader in his generation, and one of them at any rate an outstanding figure in the history of the world's thought. A word as to its object may not be amiss. Isaiah suggests sermons, but there are no sermons here. Browning suggests essays, but this is no book of essays. I have meant to set my heroes side by side, to point out where there is a likeness, and then to prove the likeness, not by my own words, but by theirs. Selection and proportion, therefore, have

played a large part in my work. There are persons, good citizens and doers of the moral law, who find Isaiah dull and Browning unintelligible. If this book, through some inadvertence or the gift of ill-judged friends, should fall into the hands of any such, they will presently cast it from them as the abomination of desolation. They will be right. It was never meant for them. But I am not without hope that there may be some who have known and loved Isaiah, while they have not known much about Browning, and some others, who have known and loved Browning, while they have thought of Isaiah as inspired but without much human interest, whom my book may lead to want to know the other better. It is those who have cared much for both who will know best whether I have done my work well or ill.

A. R.

WEST CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA

January, 1909

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE COMMON GROUND OF POETRY AND RELIGION	I
II. ISAIAH AMONG THE PROPHETS	27
III. BROWNING AMONG THE POETS	52
IV. ISAIAH AND BROWNING	95
V. THE USE OF ASSYRIA	117
VI. THE REMNANT SHALL RETURN	149
VII. THE MEANING OF THE FUTURE	176
VIII. THE FORCE OF PERSONALITY	206
IX. THE BESETTING GOD	239

PROPHECY AND POETRY

CHAPTER I

THE COMMON GROUND OF POETRY AND RELIGION

RELIGION and Poetry are two most potent and far-reaching words. Without religion, though God would still be God, He would be banished from men's thought of Him, and the earth, in other than a physical sense, would be, as at its first beginning, without form and void. Without poetry, there would be a closing of vistas, a darkening of the heavens, a general shutting up within the limits of the material and the commonplace. The wise man of old declared that where there is no vision the people perish. If we think of humanity as one great body, the poets are, as it were, the eyes. If they were lacking, the blackness of thick darkness would settle down over a large part of life.

Neither Poetry nor Religion lend themselves easily to formal definition. There are times, of course,

when definition is most necessary, but there are other times when it is quite as likely to do harm as good. It is apt to leave out what should have been included, and to include, and so to become responsible for, what might as well have been left out. After all, definition is only another word for limitation, and now and then we like to feel that there are no walls to shut us in, no fences to bar our progress and hinder us from wandering freely at our own sweet will. We learned in school the algebraic formula for the square of a plus b . There is no doubt about it. It is a fact undeniable and incontrovertible. We can explain it and understand it, and when it has been stated the last word upon the subject has been said. But sometimes it is good for us to have to do with what we can neither altogether explain nor altogether understand. It is impossible to describe the manner in which men choose their friends. It does not by any means follow that they are the brightest or the best amongst our circle of acquaintance. Sometimes they are, sometimes they are not; it seems to be a matter of indifference. It is a most shabby-genteel kind of friendship which depends in any way upon benefits received. These may follow as an effect,

but they are quite inadequate as an exciting cause. Again, there are times when our friends do things which we dislike, or even disapprove. But somehow or other they enter into our lives, and give to us in measure which no outsider could possibly understand. There is no such complete finish to the whole matter as in the case of the algebraic formula. But if it comes to a comparison between algebra and friendship, there are few who would not feel that friendship covers a more interesting and attractive part of life.

All this is true when we come to speak of Poetry or Religion. It is not hard to find things to say about them. But it is quite impossible to say the last word about either of them, to do them up in some neat parcel which the casual customer may take away. They are too large for any such easy treatment. They mean so much that one shrinks from trying even to suggest their meaning, lest he should put it illy and awry. They carry us into deep waters where there are no soundings. We are in danger of weakening our citadel with superfluous and useless battlements, which give so many added vantage-points to any prowling enemy. However much may be said about either of them, and however truly it may

be spoken, we know that the half has not been told.

Religion is man's going out to God. It is his coming to himself among the husks of matter, and claiming for his own the Father from whose home he came. It calls upon him to lift his eyes to heaven. As we have it in the form of Christianity, it brings heaven down to earth. It is the expression and acknowledgment of our relationship to God. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. Poetry, on the other hand, is man's highest thought about himself — the world he lives in, the problems which he has to face. It is inevitable that such thought should not, sooner or later, lead to God; but in poetry God is not, as in religion, the professed goal. As Principal Shairp puts it — "To appeal to the higher side of human nature, and to strengthen it; to come to its rescue when it is overborne by worldliness and material interests; to support it by great truths, set forth in their most attractive form — this is the only worthy aim, the adequate end, of all poetic endeavor." Religion deals with the will, Poetry quickens the emotions. Religion sets forth duties. It is Poetry's business to fill those duties with enthusiasm. The prophet

speaks to man for God. The poet, at his highest, speaks to God for men. He is not different from his brethren, but he is man in the superlative degree. Poetry is like one of Chopin's Nocturnes, seeking, aspiring, hoping, yet not without a suggestion that that which is sought has not yet been found. Can man by searching find out God? The old question which comes to us from the very dawn of history has gained no new answer from the centuries that have passed over it. Then Religion comes to the rescue. It may be compared to that glorious Sanctus of Gounod, where nothing is sought because there is no need of seeking, but which lifts us from adoration to the rest that remaineth for the people of God, and to that peace of God which cannot be explained, because it passeth understanding, but which can be realized, as many a struggling soul has learned through blessed experience. If Poetry is the expression of man's highest thought, Religion is at once the acknowledgment and the satisfaction of his deepest need.

In any study of Religion, there are two words which will be constantly recurring. They are faith and love. When the ancient prophet Habakkuk

declared that the just should live by his faith, he was stating no new doctrine. It was the very principle of life. Faith of some sort is of the very air we breathe. St. Paul took the saying, and put it at the foundation of his teaching. We are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. Its triumphs are recounted in that chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews which stands as a sort of roll of honor of the ancient world. To be able to see what is invisible, to make one's own what is as yet unseen, is the surest guarantee of endurance. And we see faith's power, when we find Christ saying to the woman who came to Him for help—"Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

But while faith is so powerful, it must yield the chief place to love. There might be such a thing as loveless faith. We are told that the devils also believe, and tremble. But while there may be unfaithfulness, it would be hard to imagine such a thing as faithless love, a love which did not trust its object. The same St. Paul who preached of faith with such enthusiasm compares it directly with love to its exceeding disadvantage. Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have

not love, I am nothing. Love includes faith. It is a mere incident that it believes all things. The two great commandments of the law which Christ reiterated for His disciples were that they should love the Lord their God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and that they should love their neighbor as themselves. St. John declares that those who have learned love's meaning have passed from death to life; and when he seeks to describe God in words he can find no better definition than to say that God is love.

These words, which figure so prominently in anything that can be called religion, are not without their counterparts in poetry. What we have been thinking of as faith now becomes imagination. Not, indeed, that faith and imagination are the same, outside the garish realms of those strange sects which measure the depths of human credulity and folly. But they are alike in this,— that each has the power of grasping the unseen, of lengthening the cords of the mind, of passing from the material to the spiritual. And that love, which in religion shows itself in active ways, appears in poetry in that human interest which makes us at home in

every period of history and under every heaven, that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

To Poetry and Religion, thought of in this way, there belongs a very large common ground. Each has its own sphere, but now and again the time comes when they cannot be kept apart. It is impossible to live in the world, still less to look out upon it with any interest in what Tennyson calls “the riddle of the painful earth,” and not to be impressed by the problem of human suffering which meets us at every turn. There is no escaping from it. Now and then, like the priest and the Levite, we can put it off for a little by crossing the road and looking the other way. But the time will come when we must carry it with us whatever road we take; and when, if we close our eyes to it, it will find other means of making its presence felt. There are countless ways by which we may be afflicted and distressed, in mind, body, and estate. “Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?” It is a common enough question. Some one has said that if pessimism be true, it differs from other truths by its uselessness. But in a spirit quite different from that of the pessimist, we may almost

say that this sad question belongs to universal humanity itself. There are the many ills which flesh is heir to. The changes and chances of this mortal life press heavily upon men. It grieves us that here we have no continuing city. We cannot sing the Lord's song in a strange land. We are appalled at the absurdities of human judgment. Milton received five pounds for "Paradise Lost," while some spoiler of paper, whose wares are sold with thread and railway tickets, earns preposterous sums by the pen, more bloodthirsty than any sword, with which he murders literature. Whether suffering be physical or mental, whether it come from misunderstanding or lack of appreciation or some quite different cause, of course the Psalmist's answer to his question is the only one. "O put thy trust in God." But Poetry adds corroborative witness. By her contempt for worldliness and crass materialism, by her eager statement of the problem, by her gentle sympathy, as in those words of Virgil,

"Tears there are for human things,
And hearts are touched by mortal sufferings,"

she stands, time and again, as a minister of comfort. It is her own work, while it is Religion's too.

Another region in which Poetry becomes the hand-maid of Religion is where it broadens men's horizon, and bids them "look abroad, and see to what fair countries they are bound." If he is limited simply to his own experience, the most traveled man is desperately provincial, after all. The man who cannot picture to himself what he has not directly before his eyes is bound to be, not only a heretic, but a bore. He is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils, or for whatever may chance to come his way. He is a roaring lion in the house, and a biting serpent in the path. He canonizes prejudice, and deifies intellectual sluggishness. Against this half-life, a dead mind in an ungoverned body, Poetry lifts a warning voice. It calls upon men to think, and to think of something besides their own rights, and their neighbors' errors. If Euodias and Syntyche cannot agree about their own affairs, Poetry gives them a common meeting-place outside themselves. It goes far towards taking away from men their right to complain of loneliness and isolation. There is nothing that can quite take the place of human companionship. We need our friends. We need the encouragement and appreciation of our kind. It is good to feel the pressure

of a friendly shoulder as we march through life. But, given half a chance, it is a man's own fault if he does not see beyond the end of the village street. The things that are not seen, immediately, are the eternal things; and Poetry, as it quickens and broadens the mind, gives us power to grasp these things. It is not what we are in the habit of calling Revelation. As Ewald defines it, Revelation, in its narrower sense, is a spiritual incident in human history which is now closed. It is not Religion. That requires, not only that a man should see the heavenly vision, but that he should not be disobedient to it. But, without Poetry, Religion would lose one of its most efficient aids.

Not only does Poetry broaden the horizon. It has an upward, as well as an outward look. It comes to men with a message of good cheer. It bids them stir up the gift that is in them, and be not afraid to take their places in the world. To inspire and encourage is its business. The poet is fellow-laborer with the prophet. The prophet speaks out what God has given him to say. He cannot be silent if he would, just as the true poet "does but sing because he must." He is a man of the spirit, taken possession of by a

power higher than himself. He is a watchman, set to look out over the world, and to see where help is needed. He is a seer, with eyes sharp beyond those of other men. And the poet is these things too. When Poetry helps men to bear their burdens, and points them to a higher life, it is doing the very work of God.

In this connection we may take one step farther. Poetry enlarges life, and quickens it, and lifts it to a higher plane. But it does even more than this. It looks beyond life, and tries to cast light upon the problem which vexed Job of old — “If a man die, shall he live again?” It would pierce the darkness which, until Christ’s resurrection, was all but impenetrable. It is very different, of course, from dogmatic theology. The one seeks after truth. The other has truth, or thinks it has it, and aims to set it forth in orderly form. Where things are too definite, Poetry has no place, for like the Spirit of God we cannot tell whence it comes nor whither it goes. Any attempt to make Poetry the vehicle of dogmatism must always fail, as many popular hymns cry aloud to heaven. Those are regions where Poetry comes as an intruder, and where it is very likely, if it insists on

forcing an entrance, to play the fool. But where it inquires, and seeks, and hopes, though it concerns itself with the very deepest problems, it is never out of place.

St. Vincent of Lerins, searching for a standard by which Catholic faith might be determined, declared that that should be so regarded which had been believed always, everywhere, and by all. It was not a standard favorable to the formation of elaborate Articles of Faith. But in the way in which we have been thinking of Poetry, we need not fear to submit it even to so severe a test. For the Poetry of every period and every nation has taken on, somewhere or other, this religious guise. We are told that the inscription on the cross of Christ was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, so that all who spoke those languages might be able to read it in their common speech. And surely, in each one of them, there was that which was making ready for Christianity, long before our Lord Himself appeared upon the earth. At sundry times and in divers manners God spake, not only by the prophets, but through the poets. They were religious, even though they could not be Christian. Their views of life have

played an important part in shaping the thought of later times.

Any mention of Greek poetry which should leave out Homer would be absurd. It is true, the religious element in Homer is rare, but if we give to the word religion its full sweep it is by no means lacking. It is the Christian teaching that he who loves God will love his brother also. Conversely, he who can forget himself for his friend's sake, whatever may be his failings, is on the highroad that leads to the kingdom of God. Achilles was very far from being a pattern of the Christian virtues. But in his devotion to his friend Patroclus the man who could be so fierce and cruel becomes as a little child. Among the opposing hosts of Troy there is a like instance of that devotion which lifts men heavenward, together with an elevation of duty above all else which fits in well with the heroic stature of the poem. Hector returns to the city, and there he finds his wife and little son. He is reminded of all that they are to him, of all that his life and safety must mean to them. He recognizes the force of Andromache's counsels of prudence, the claim upon him of her affection and her helplessness. He grieves at what may happen. He is

not blind to the cruel chance of war. But he must go. This devotion of friend to friend, of husband to wife, of patriot to fatherland, can hardly be called religion, but it is certainly religious in a very real sense, if we are to accept St. John's saying that every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. We shall search in vain in Homer for a discussion of those problems of life which took such deep hold upon the thought of later Greece. But we must remember that Homer belongs to the very dawn of history, to the beginnings of civilization. He is, as it were, a child setting forth the childhood of the race, and in such matters it is as a child that he speaks and thinks and understands. It would be unnatural if it were otherwise. Homer as a philosopher or a theologian would be an enormity. To say that Homer's religion is implicit rather than explicit, that he does not concern himself with religious problems, is simply to acquit him of forced precociousness. He reflects the spirit of the time in which he lived. The time for deeper thought had not yet come.

When we pass on from Homer to what may be called the Golden Age of the Greek drama, we find

ourselves in quite another atmosphere. There is still fighting. Æschylus was at Marathon, and Sophocles was a general in the Athenian war with Samos. But life has become less simple than in earlier days. It is not all action and the noise of war. Men have come to feel that it means something, and they are wondering and wondering what it is. “A profound sense of the Divine government of the world, of a righteous power punishing pride and vice, pursuing the children of the guilty to the tenth generation, but showing mercy to the contrite — in short, a mysterious and almost Jewish ideal of offended holiness — pervades the whole work of the tragedians.” These are the words of John Addington Symonds, than whom no one has done more to make the Greek poets known to English readers. And so we find the idea of Nemesis, the sense of retribution, the certainty that what a man sows that shall he also reap, appearing everywhere. With Æschylus it is a mysterious and awful law, imposed from without, and in itself of more importance than the men controlled by it. With Sophocles the human side is made more prominent. Æschylus is the judge, intent upon the triumph of right principle;

but Sophocles is the pastor, who cares for men. He is concerned not so much with the law as with the lawbreaker, not so much with the sin itself as with the sinner. With each, the conduct of human affairs is referred to a higher power. But Æschylus lays the emphasis upon the gods who direct, while Sophocles rather lays it upon the men who perform or who fall short. If Æschylus is the theologian, Sophocles is the interpreter of human passions, the apologist for human weakness. The wrath of God is no less real to him than to his predecessor, but it is less inflexible. We are made to feel the mysteriousness of existence.

“Many the forms of life
Wondrous and strange to see;
But nought than man appears
More wondrous and more strange.”

Where there has been sin there must be suffering, often vicarious suffering. But sufferings may serve as lessons. The spirit of man may rise superior to the misfortunes which are likely to overtake man. No external curse, even though it should come down from heaven, can take away real purity of heart and genuine nobleness of soul. Sophocles is said to have

written no less than one hundred and thirteen plays, of which only seven remain to us. It seems a pity that the others could not have been ransomed from oblivion in exchange for a few hundred thousand works which still survive. But in the seven plays which are left, Sophocles shows marvellous insight into human life. He paints it sad — he is always the tragedian. But we are taught that the noble things in it are the things by which it is to be esteemed.

Turning from Greece to Rome, we find that law, rather than religion or speculative thought, was the genius of the Roman people. When Lucretius devoted himself to the composition of a poem which was ostensibly religious, its atmosphere was legal rather than theological. But Virgil, at any rate, is by no means without claim to be regarded as a religious poet. The Christian Fathers held him in special honor. St. Augustine called him the finest and noblest of poets. St. Jerome, who looked severely on all heathen writers, thought it unseemly that priests should read him, but allowed that he was a necessity for boys. His verses are found in the burial-places of the Catacombs, associated with the cross and other Christian symbols. There is an old

legend that St. Paul, on his way to Rome, turned aside to visit Virgil's tomb near Naples. As we have it in the sonorous mediæval Latin —

“Ad Maronis mausoleum
Ductus, fudit super eum
Piae rorem lacrymae;
Quem te, inquit, reddidisse,
Si te vivum invenissem,
Poetarum maxime!”

It may be roughly translated thus —

“To the tomb of Virgil coming,
All his excellences summing,
Wept the apostle, holy Paul.
O, if I could but have known thee,
What the things I would have shown thee,
Greatest poet of them all!”

Virgil's religion is implied rather than expressed, to be found more in the whole spirit of his writing than in any form of words. In an age of unbelief and luxury and license he still reverences the ancient gods and sings the praises of simplicity. It is sometimes said that the vulgar splendor and garish magnificence of which our own age is not without examples had its prototype in the Rome of Virgil's day. He

was no rude democrat, assailing rich men because they happened to be rich, and pouring scorn on everything which did not meet his taste. But there is a healthiness about him which compares most favorably with the ideals of the time in which he lived. He is the poet of the country. In the *Æneid*, we have the figure of a man of destiny. *Æneas* has often been compared, to his disadvantage, with the Homeric heroes. It could not be otherwise. He is less truculent than Achilles, and if truculency be made the standard he must take the second place. But he is a warrior only by accident, or at least as an incident in his career. He fights, and he fights admirably, but he fights not for the pleasure of it, but because it is necessary to gain his end. He is the bearer of the Trojan gods to Italy. He is the "pious *Æneas*" always. In our day, the word pious has come to have a narrower significance, a little technical, and sometimes with a suggestion not quite agreeable. But as Virgil uses it, it means the man who does his duty. It includes all human affections; love for the old father whom he carried on his shoulders; for the boy whom he sought to teach the meaning of virtue and genuine toil, leaving him to learn from

others the meaning of success; patriotism, and fidelity to the dead. He has to found a kingdom for his son, to establish a glorious future for his race. His treatment of Dido stands out, of course, as a blot upon his character. But when we think of him as one who was not his own, but who had been set apart by heaven for its especial work, we have an explanation of his conduct, even though it be no excuse. In other than the Pauline sense, but still in a sense that cannot be ignored nor brushed away, he is the servant of God.

We have found religion, and such religion as could reach its fulfilment in Christianity, among those of whom we are wont to think as heathen. When now we come to Hebrew poetry, it is all religious. Indeed, we are so apt to think of it upon its moral and didactic side that we sometimes forget that it is poetry. In the Book of Job we have the problem of suffering and its relation to God discussed from every point of view. If we seek for an example of the strength of friendship, we have it in David's lament for Jonathan. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of

women." The same David shows the intensity of a father's love, even though it be but ill-deserved. It is history, but it is poetry too. The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" It is the exceeding bitter cry that has gone up to heaven, from one generation to another, from those who have been wounded in their tenderest part in that they have been called upon to bear the ingratitude, and to mourn the disgrace, of the children of many hopes and prayers. As for the Psalms, they have been the treasure-house of devotion in every age. From the prophets we have the voice of God to man, but here we have man calling upon God. They give us the spiritual history of the times in which they were composed. They put into words for us those most secret feelings, which, speaking for ourselves, we should neither be able nor willing to express. They touch the very depths of human suffering. Never had the miscarriage of friendship a more tender elegy than from him who was betrayed by one with whom he had taken sweet counsel, and walked in

trust and confidence in the house of God. They show us the patriot in exile, the man of high ideals and tender conscience who has lost his self-respect. But they go also to the other extreme, and give us examples of faith and joy and confidence for which in any such degree we should look elsewhere in vain. To exhaust the religious element in Hebrew poetry would be to quote the entire Psalter, and then to add whatever poetry still remained. Of a very different spirit from that which is commonly brought before us in the Psalms, though even there there are most notable examples of it, is Deborah's song of victory. It would be impossible in the New Testament, but it is none the less magnificent. It is totally lacking in the Christian virtues, but it is tremendous in its fervid intensity — religious, because in God's cause, and in no personal and selfish matter. "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there

he fell down dead." At home they waited for him. They gloated over triumphs that should never come to pass. "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?'" Her court ladies give an answer that is very different from the real one. And then, as with a crash of thunder, Deborah makes an end. "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

Between the ancient and the modern world, there is a great gulf fixed. Old things passed away, and all things became new. With the old civilizations, the old literatures came to an end. Men still thought, of course, and wrote down what they thought. But their thoughts were turned into other channels. In the sixth century Justinian codified the Roman Law. The writings of the Christian Fathers were no doubt religious, but by no stretch of imagination could they be called poetry. There was a long transition period, when there were fightings without and fears within, when the world, shaken out of its old ruts, was trying to find itself again, when men's hands were busy but

their brains were dull. There were many who were concerned about their souls, but more and more the wilderness and the monastery came to offer a short and easy method of escape. For more adventurous dispositions the Crusades offered an outlet for superfluous energy, and combined romance and religion in a way which could not but be popular. It is not until the thirteenth century that another great poet appears. Though there was dearth of religious thought during the Middle Ages, and especially of religious imagination, there was no lack of religious action, or of a religious background for ideas. We may question if the Church went very deep, in spite of the great Cathedrals which were the product of that time. It is not likely that it touched the springs of human conduct as closely as in happier periods. But that its influence was widespread there can be no doubt. And when at last, after all those centuries of waiting, the great poet came who is the link between the remote past and modern days, he paints his pictures and thinks his thought against the background of his own time. Dante is religious through and through. In every line of the "Divine Comedy" God is immanent.

There is no getting away from Him. His judgments are the subject of the poem. And with all that is fierce in it, and terrible, its motive power is love. It is little enough that we know of Beatrice; but in the "Vita Nuova" Dante writes that he hopes to say of her that which has never been said of any woman. The "Divine Comedy" was the result.

We have traversed many lands and many centuries. We have found no great poetry from which some element of religion was absent, nor could we find it anywhere. There are, of course, regions of the religious life in which poetry has no place, but wherever there is Poetry of the highest type Religion cannot be very far away.

CHAPTER II

ISAIAH AMONG THE PROPHETS

THREE are many voices which clamor to be heard. Words of one sort and another force themselves upon men, and demand attention for themselves, jumbled together in a strange medley of discord and confusion, of impudence and reverence, of hopelessness and appeal. There is a countless multitude of ever-changing questions which make up for us the mystery and the tragedy and the responsibility of life. There are the world-old problems of sickness and pain, of doubt and wretchedness and affliction, of sin and punishment, solution for which must still be sought, though centuries of seeking have not availed to find an answer. How shall we take our places in a world that it is so hard to understand, and amid the varying standards what is to be the measure of our manhood? What makes success, and what makes failure? Where each one can do so little, what shall we select

to do? So they crowd on one another, despairing, passionate, indifferent even; eager, hopeful, pitiful; the thousand questions that have to do with life. There are many answers for them, some of them misleading and grotesque enough; but above the tumult of uncertain cries there rises a louder and more commanding voice. Here is one who speaks with authority, for it is the word of the Lord which he proclaims. He is a prophet, a messenger, a preacher of righteousness, an interpreter of the ways of God to men. Such men have lived in every age. But the Hebrew prophets whose writings are contained in the Old Testament possessed in highest development all the characteristics of their class.

The earlier prophets, men like Samuel and Elijah, stand out distinctly from the record of their time. We know what they did, but not very much of what they said. They were men of affairs, not men of letters. The figures of the later prophets are much more shadowy and dim. They have their word to say, and they say it; but for themselves they are content to remain in the shadow which the heavenly brightness of their message casts. But now and again that message reveals them, and distinguishes

them from one another as well as from the outside world.

In the early years of King Uzziah's reign, when the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were still prosperous and "at ease," the word of the Lord came to Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa. He is the first of those whom we may call the literary prophets. Unlike most of his fellows, he is no special type of man. Rather, he seems to stand out from the pages of the Old Testament, "a colossal figure of generic manhood." He is the possession, not of any class or disposition, but of the race. He comes to the king's court at Bethel, at festival time. Though his little book is not destitute of visions, it is as an apostle of facts that he chiefly speaks. Do not results follow upon certain causes? If two are seen walking together in the desert, must it not be that they had appointed to meet? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Will the prophet speak, unless the Lord hath commanded him? Nay, does one need to be a prophet, in the usual sense of the word, to hear the word of the Lord? His discourse is interrupted. He has told

unpalatable truths. He has violated the conventionalities of religion. He is a visionary. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, makes himself spokesman for the rest. "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophecy there; but prophecy not any more at Bethel; for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." Does Amaziah, then, judging others by himself, suppose that these are mere professional utterances which Amos has been speaking? There is nothing professional about him. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophecy unto my people Israel." So Amos left his flock, and came to Bethel, and said what he had to say. Then he disappears. It was not for him, as for Isaiah or Jeremiah, to watch over the fortunes of the state for many years. When he has done his work, there is no more to be said of him. It is most likely that he went back to the lonely deserts of Tekoa, and found his sheep again, and took up the thread of his interrupted life. He thought of "Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of

death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night," while far away, across the wilderness, the lights of Jerusalem reminded him that he was not the sole inhabitant of the world.

"The Lord took me as I followed the flock." If there are many ways in which God speaks to men, Amos would tell us that there is no man to whom He may not speak. We shut God up within conditions; we limit Him to times and places, we make such words as spiritual and secular stand not for complementary but for opposing spheres of life. Samuel may hear God's voice, for he grows up within the precincts of the temple. To Isaiah and his brethren there comes a special call, a moment of extraordinary consecration, the power to apprehend the sights and sounds of another and higher world. Amos lacks all this. He is no prophet, nor prophet's son. His only school has been the desert. His companions have been his sheep, and the wild beasts of which he so often speaks. His books are the bright Eastern stars, the winds that blow strong across the pasture, the caravans which come and go. There is nothing technically religious in such a life; but technical religion is religion in its very lowest form.

There are certain definite things that should be done for God, but religion means not so much the doing of certain things as the doing of all things in a certain way. It is not a beautiful garment to be worn on holy days; it is the very breath of life. And Amos stands for just the preparation that common life may bring to hear God's word. To put it in another form, he teaches the religious responsibility and power of lay people. He is no prophet; but he is commanded to speak for God. He is no prophet's son; but he hears the voice of God. He is a dweller in the desert; but God is there. His task is of the humblest and most prosaic kind; but God took him as he went about it, and bade him do His work. There have been times and places when it was the custom to identify the Church with the clergy. Beginning perhaps with a tendency on their part to claim its privileges, it developed into what seemed at times like a tendency on the part of the laity to leave them to perform its duties. But the difference of orders in the Church is a difference not of dignity nor even of responsibility, but of service. God does not reach all men by the same methods, nor does He expect all men to do the same work for Him. But He can

speak to Amos in the desert, no less than to Samuel in the temple or to David on the throne.

The logical order is not always the chronological one. The Book of Zechariah belongs to the later period of Hebrew prophecy, but that idea of personal responsibility which we have seen in Amos is still here. It is a confused book, and a confusing. At one moment, we have a picture of security and confidence which could not be painted in more glowing colors. There is no cutting-off in the very prime of life. Men fill out their appointed time, and die only because they are worn out, and have no longer strength to live. The children need no watching, for there is no harm that could come to them. It is a time when the very weakest and most helpless are secure. And then, in another moment, we have the clash of weapons and the tramp of marching men.

But it is not only this abrupt change of subject which makes Zechariah's book confusing. In every part of it there is a use of metaphor and imagery which puzzles and bewilders. The prophet gives free rein to his imagination. He speaks in parables, and teaches by pictures which may have been obvious enough when they were drawn, but which have

not gained in clearness by the lapse of centuries. There is a man who rides on a red horse among the myrtle-trees. There is a man with a measuring line. There are candlesticks, and lamps, and olive-trees. There are chariots and crowns. We may take one of these pictures from the rest, because it seems to characterize the prophet's thought.

He looks about him, and he sees people who are in need of help. They want leadership and guidance. There are many paths, and they do not know which path to take. There are many counsellors, and they do not know to whom to listen. They are hungry for the word of life, but they are like flocks who wander where the fields are parched and dry. Who can find pasture for them? The prophet takes the vacant place. It is a place of honor, but of care and labor. He will give them what they need. He will feed them. To hold them together, to make them responsive to his call, he takes two staves. Beauty and Bands, he calls them. They are the aids by which he hopes to do his work.

It is true, his undertaking failed. His staves were cut asunder and cast away. But his failure was not the prophet's fault. Without a figure, what he tried

to say seems to be simply this. There are those who are in trouble and distress, and they have been committed to his care. He wants to help them in their perplexity, and to lead them to the highest life. How can he do it? What can he take to help him? First of all, he will point them to what is beautiful, and show them, what they will soon learn for themselves, how close is the connection between what is beautiful and what is good. And then, he will dwell on the things that make men to be of one mind in a house, the things that make for peace. He will show that selfishness means isolation and hideous loneliness, that God Himself has set the solitary in families, and made of one blood all the nations of the earth. What draws men to one another will draw them to God, unless it be degraded and abused.

Beauty and Bands — neither the one nor the other is religion, and yet they have their work to do for God. They are staves in the shepherd's hand, without which he would be hindered and crippled in his work. Beauty may be made a means of grace, an Article of Religion, as it were. A beautiful church bears its witness for God to many who take no part in what goes on inside. A beautiful service

touches springs of feeling which argument could never reach. A beautiful poem or picture seems to make mean things meaner, unlovely things unlovelier, and base things baser than they were before. Satisfaction with what is low and degrading comes usually from ignorance of what is better. If now an appreciation of what is beautiful can be awakened, appreciation of what is good may quickly follow. And what is true of things is even truer when it comes to be applied to people. Goodness has a power of its own. We honor it, we respect it, sometimes we love it. But this last not always. It may be forbidding and severe. There may be something icy in its grasp, and chilling in its breath. Though we might not be justified in refusing to call it goodness, it may take forms which not only do not attract men to it, but repel. It is the righteousness which is of the law, with nothing human in its voice or touch. But when, in place of goodness, we have what may be called beauty of character, that is quite different. Things may be lacking which ought not to be lacking, but it draws men to it, and commands them, whether they will or no. The word which our English Bible renders Beauty is trans-

lated "Graciousness" by one of the leading scholars who has written upon Zechariah. It is the staff called Graciousness which the shepherd takes to help him feed his flock. And Graciousness describes as well as any word that combination of qualities which goes to make up beauty of disposition. There is grace, both in the Greek and Hebrew sense, grace human and divine. There is the knowledge of what to do and how to do it, of what to say and how to say it. There is the power of meeting men on their own ground, and making them feel at ease. There is that suppression of one's self which is at the opposite pole from the vulgar self-assertion which may be found in all classes of society, from the prize-fighter to the theologian. The prize-fighter uses his fists as nature gave them to him. The theologian, who is oftener only an ecclesiastic, clenches them about a pen, and dips his pen in gall. Both alike, they lack that Graciousness with which the shepherd fed his flock. Where Beauty is, Bands will be close by; for where there is Graciousness, Sympathy cannot be far away.

This personal obligation is no monopoly of the prophetic office; it belongs to the nation as a whole.

Jerusalem has been laid desolate, but now the day of restoration is at hand. It will have consequences extending beyond the people who are most concerned. "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" When they were tried and humbled, then they could be alone. They could pass alone through the valley of the shadow. But at the time of restoration they could be alone no longer. Out of all languages of the nations there were found those to hang upon them, and claim some share in the triumph that had come to them. Because God was with them, those who felt their own need of God must be with them too.

Amos left his sheep that he might speak God's word. Zechariah took the staves that he might lead the flock. There is the same sense of Divine compulsion in the great prophet Jeremiah. He was by nature a peaceful, quiet man. He loved his home at Anathoth. A lodging-place in the wilderness, where he could have left the city's treachery and tumult far behind, was all that he would have asked.

Then the voice of the Lord sounded in his ears. At first he hesitated. "Then said I, Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." He was timid and sensitive of rebuke, and he knew that there were no smooth things which he must say. Why should he be a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth? But his natural shrinking could not stand against the call of God. He prophesied for fifty dreary years. He was born at a time when things were well in the land, and he lived to see conditions change from good to bad, from bad to worse, from worse to the very worst which the imagination could conceive. There were times when he rebelled against the fate which compelled him, with all his native gentleness, to be forever speaking harsh words into deaf ears. After he has been buffeted and punished as a common criminal, his patience fails him. "I am in derision daily; every one mocketh me." He tries to find safety in silence. "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name." But he was too genuine a man to be able to escape an unpleasant duty by running away from it. "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my

bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." Now and then there comes a faint ray of hope, but always the darkness settles down again. Jeremiah is a prophet, and he must look upon the institution of prophecy as it becomes more and more degraded. He is a priest, who must see the priesthood growing more and more corrupt. He is a citizen whose counsels are jeered at by self-seekers, and he must look on, helpless, while the city which he loves is hurried to destruction by knaves and fools. He puts his warnings into writing, and sends them to the king; but the king, after three or four pages, flings the manuscript into the fire which is on the hearth, and watches it as it crumbles into ashes. He must bear all the sorrows of his people, and he has sorrows of his own besides. He is thrust into the stocks. He is thrown into a foul dungeon, where it was a question whether he should starve or strangle. From the moment that he set out to do God's work, his life is one long succession of disappointment, despondency, and failure.

But it is just here that he surpasses Amos and Zechariah. They felt the responsibility which rested upon them. Jeremiah feels the responsibility which

rests upon God. Since he can do so little, God must do the more. For himself, he has nothing to glory in. He never knew the elation which attends success. He had high ambitions, not for himself, but for his country, and he saw them fade and disappear. He was in perpetual conflict with stupid wickedness which could not even understand his point of view. His own work was a complete and dismal failure. But always, back of his failure, back of the shameless misdeeds of his people, which he can see, but which he is powerless to prevent, there stands the vision of the glory and the majesty of God. There are times when the way in which he identifies himself with his Divine master suggests the New Testament rather than the Old. Be it as it may be with his work and its result. But Jeremiah flings himself on God, and finds in Him the justification for all that he has done or failed in doing.

But after all, we have not yet reached the heights of prophecy. When Mr. Sargent drew the figures of the prophets on the walls of the Public Library in Boston, it was no accident that Isaiah and Hosea stood out from all the rest. All spoke for God, but these two were separated from their brethren even

as the company of prophets was separated from mankind at large. In the figure of Isaiah there is a suggestion of that passion for righteousness, that power of seeing far into the future, that contempt for half-way measures, all of which meet us in every chapter of his book. In Hosea we have a man of a different type, perhaps less powerful, but no less rare and fine. This is a man who has seen affliction, but, though he tells his story, he does not call attention to himself. He seeks no pity for his trouble, he asks no praise for his forbearance. He wraps himself in the long folds of his white garment, and looks out on a blackness of thick darkness in which there is no light but God. With all his sensitiveness, with his native yearning for what is true and pure and good, his lot is cast in the valley of the shadow of moral death. He does not weep, like Jeremiah, for he must watch while Ephraim riots. He is left alone; and yet, like One who bore his name in later years, he is not alone, because the Father is with him.

It is in the depth and fulness of Hosea's religious nature that we may gain our best impression of the man. He is under no delusions as to the reality and

ghastliness of sin. It is all about him. It has wrecked his home, and made his children outcasts. Our hearts are made to bleed for poor little Lo-ruhamah, the child who may not know a father's love. But while he knows, and knows in his own person, the hatefulness of sin, he knows even more surely the tenderness and long-suffering of God. His faith brings him even to an understanding of his own misfortunes, usually the last resting-place of unbelief. The wind and storm may yet fulfil God's word. In the darkest passages of his life, with a boldness which startles and surprises, he sees the working of God's hand. In the very hideousness of the situation he finds, not an occasion for cursing God and asking for himself that he might die, but an opportunity for watchful and self-forgetful love. As with Jeremiah, though the story itself belongs unmistakably to the Old Testament, the spirit of the New Testament is here. "When he was yet a great way off, his father ran to meet him." So might it be with the faithless wife who had left her husband, or with a faithless people who had wandered from their God. The sin was great, but love was greater still.

In Hosea's dealing with his people, we have the

same chaos of affairs, the same Spirit of God brooding over the face of the abyss. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were familiar with every detail of indecency and dishonor. The yellowest of our yellow journals, though they have their own methods of making crime distinguished and brutishness interesting, have no more dismal pictures to set before us than those which we may find in the pages of Hosea's little book. There is not one line which would lead us to suppose that his words were ever heeded or obeyed. But what he might be able to accomplish lay with God. It was for him to bear his testimony. And so out of the witch's cauldron which he was compelled to stir, full of misery and shameful ignorance and naked vice and overbearing crime, there comes a message from the loving and forgiving God. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned from them. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon."

It is Hosea's knowledge of God, and the intense-
ness of his religious disposition, that give significance

to his pictures of the corruption of his time. There is impurity of every sort, the wildest license and the freest rein. There is deceit, and fraud, and violence. There is an impudent playing at religiousness which apes religion. There is a casting-off of personal responsibility, a worship of cheap success, a fixed doctrine that any end justifies any means. All these are faults of high antiquity, but their eye is yet undimmed, and their natural strength is unabated still. But with Hosea the thought is not so much that bad deeds have been done. Rather it is that men have failed to take their places as the children of God; but that even sin, with all its train of hideous consequences, cannot destroy God's love.

There were other prophets, of course, some of them of towering stature, but those whom we have considered mark the movement of prophecy from the recognition of individual responsibility by Amos to that trust in the power of God which was Jeremiah's solace, and in the love of God which was Hosea's only hope. Isaiah was the most conspicuous, as he seems to have been the most thoroughly representative, of them all. He lived in Jerusalem later than Amos and Hosea, but before Jeremiah

and Zechariah, at a time when prophecy was well established, but before it had begun to show any marks of weakness or decay. His eternal subject is the righteousness of God, but the misdeeds of men were constantly before his eyes. He did not seek them, but they flung themselves upon him as the raging waves of the sea assault the coast. Living where he did and when he did, there were times when it must have seemed as if the language of denunciation were his mother-tongue. He paints Jerusalem in dreary colors. The city, where of all the cities in the world justice might be looked for, was full of murderers. Its high officials were "companions of thieves." Commercialism was all but universal, not only in politics but in every walk of life. Gain was the highest motive which appealed to men. The head and the heart bowed down before the pocket. A certain kind of religion was not unfashionable, but it seems to have been no more than a fussy formalism. The women shared the general demoralization. Not only did they fail to set before the men a higher standard, but they made bad worse. Their extravagance, their vulgar ostentation, the flaunting pride with which they tried

to make up for their total lack of self-respect — all these the prophet describes with piercing keenness. They possessed every ornament except the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. The city was holy, but the citizens were corrupt. God was just and righteous, but those who should have been His subjects were extortioners and cheats. This was the contrast which met the prophet's view.

It may be that there were some about him who wondered why he should speak so sternly of evils for which he was not responsible, and many of which were quite beyond his help. He tells his reasons. Whether or not they are satisfactory to others, they will at least help to satisfy himself, and keep his heart from failing. He looks back over some years of active work, in which there has been much effort and but slight accomplishment. He looks forward to a future uncertain, of course, as the future always is, but in which there is very little promise of better times. And then he sets down for all what until now had been his own possession. In the midst of his career he goes back to its beginning, and describes an experience which explains why his life has been what it is, and why no other life was possible. It

was not self-righteousness which made him the accuser of his brethren. He does not bewail their sins that he may contrast them with the glitter of his own virtues. He is no fugitive champion, representing nothing, entering the lists without equipment, contending against he knows not what. His life is one which he has chosen for himself, but he is not himself his own horizon. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." There came to the prophet a definite vision at a definite time. One day he went about his work like other people. The next he was overpowered by such a realization of the Divine holiness that all other things were crowded out, and his life was turned into a new channel. The prophet paints the picture in the most brilliant colors. The heavenly glory filled the temple. The Lord was high and lifted up, above the changes and chances of the world. About the throne were seraphims, strange heavenly creatures, all wings and voice, ready for service and for praise. They veiled their faces from the radiant glory. They held themselves back from wandering hither and thither, that they might be prepared on

the instant to do God's work. But when He spoke, there were wings with which they might make haste to do His bidding. They are not silent in their lofty place. Those who are so close to God cannot but worship Him. It is only those who are far away from Him who can be indifferent to His majesty and power. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." And others make answer—"The whole earth is full of His glory." Then from the throne itself there comes a voice of approval and acceptance, so loud that the threshold of the door is shaken, and the temple is filled with the smoke of the incense which ascends to God.

This was the prophet's vision. It was the holiness of God, and not the sinfulness of men, which took possession of him. Is it strange that his first feeling was one of terror? He is a man of unclean lips, and he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. What has he to do with such a vision? What is there, either in himself or his surroundings, that it should be given him to see the King, the Lord of hosts? In such a presence, there is need of purification. And so he tells us of the seraph who brings the glowing coal from off the altar, and lays it on his mouth, that the heavenly flame may burn away all

earthly dross. Before he is suffered to speak for God, he must be made fit to speak. The vision of God's holiness must be completed by a vision of His ability to fit men for His use. Isaiah has seen God's glory. Now he hears God's voice. "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" It is not a command. It is not even a request. If we may say so, it is only a statement of the Divine need, a confession that God must look to men to help Him in His work. But this is the very highest dignity of manhood. The very thought that God would deign to speak to men at all seemed worthy of wonder, in those centuries before the first Christmas day, when the Son of God was born into the world and was found in fashion as a man. That He could need men filled life with new glory. And when Isaiah hears this word, there is not a moment's hesitation. Whom should God send, but the man who had seen the heavenly radiance, who had heard the Divine voice? "Then said I, Here am I, send me."

This is Isaiah's apology for his life. He had to fight with fools, than which there can be nothing more trying to men's souls. He had to reason with those who had no minds. Again and again he cast

his pearls before swine, and gave that which was holy to the dogs. He was the mock of drunkards, the scorn of vulgar revellers. His heavenly visions were disregarded for crude words of cheap sensation-mongers. There were times when the highest places were filled by the lowest men. A thousand schemes must be debated, when the way lay plain. There was the confusion of incompetency, the unrest which always attends those whose actions have no controlling motive. But Isaiah had his message to deliver, and he delivered it. How could he withhold that which had been committed to him only in trust? If there are those who are disposed to find fault with his vehemence and vigor, it is not his vehemence, but God's. He has the respect for personal obligation that Amos had, and Zechariah's sense of national responsibility, and Jeremiah's trust in God, and Hosea's certainty of the redeeming power of God's love. But more than this, it is that the Lord has opened the gates of heaven, and taken Isaiah into His confidence. The prophet whose feet are planted squarely on the earth is admitted to the heavenly point of view. From this high vantage-ground, Isaiah sets out to do his work.

CHAPTER III

BROWNING AMONG THE POETS

JUST as Isaiah can best be understood as one of a group of Hebrew prophets, so Browning takes his place among a company of English poets. One generation succeeds another, and poet after poet interprets to his contemporaries those great ideas which form the soul of poetry. Wordsworth follows Milton. Tennyson follows Spenser. Browning would not have been what he was if Shakespeare had not gone before him. Not indeed that any such towering eminence can be claimed for Browning as for the elder poet. Shakespeare might have belonged to any country or to any time. Whenever or wherever he might have appeared, it would have been as an intellectual miracle, not to be accounted for, not to be explained by the common standards of men's thought. His writings tell us very little about himself — the best of them nothing at all. But he is concerned with nothing smaller

than humanity itself. If there were anyone, anywhere, so audacious or so dull of mind as to deny his power, it might be said of him, as Antigone said to Creon, that we bear the charge of folly from a fool. The judgment would be universal — the *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus* of anything that could pretend to literary criticism.

It is true that Shakespeare has his limitations, but that which is perhaps the most obvious and striking of them all is apparent rather than real. A student of literature has written an essay, — and a very good essay, too — to which he has given the title, “The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare.” But we must be catholic in our use of words when we have to do with such a man. If we give Religion some of those limited and narrow meanings which sectaries of one sort and another have delighted to force upon it we might look for it in vain. Shakespeare is no sermon-writer, no controversialist nor exhorter. He never mounts the pulpit-stairs. He takes the Church for granted, but he is no defender of the faith; the Church must fight her own battles for all of him. The recognition of the duty that men owe to God in the mere acknowledgment of

their dependence upon Him is wholly lacking. Ferdinand asks Miranda her name, "chiefly that he may set it in his prayers," but it is Miranda who is the object of his homage. Gratiano, the roysterer, describes the correct conduct which he purposes, in which prayer-books, and sober habits, and loud amens play a large part. But this is a cloak — as Polonius puts it, sugaring o'er the devil himself with devotion's visage. In portraying the devotion of a lover to his mistress Shakespeare is unexcelled, and what he says by Romeo and many others he gathers up and raises to its highest terms in those sonnets which contain his only hint at autobiography. But this is as far as he goes. In all his writing, and he shows us many men speaking with many mouths, there is not one passage that could be called devotional. Those who are seeking for an expression of the soul's outpouring of itself to God must look for it elsewhere.

Again, there is an absence of theology which is in striking contrast to the great poets of that century which, for so many years, we called our own. There are certain tenets to which Shakespeare makes occasional allusion, and which he seems

to take entirely as a matter of course, but that is all. Henry IV recognizes the doctrine of the Atonement. Maria, in the midst of her laughter at the unfortunate Malvolio, drops the casual remark that every Christian means to be saved by believing rightly. But, while Christianity is often implicit, it is nowhere set forth in orderly arrangement. Nor is this absence of the devotional and the theological made up for by the ecclesiasticism which sometimes essays to take the place of one or both of these. There are some who ask no questions, if only the Church be held in sufficient honor. That is enough. In Shakespeare's plays the Church is often presented, but the atmosphere of his pages is not that which Miss Charlotte M. Yonge was wont to breathe. He shows us bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, but as we look at them we are reminded of the little boy who was asked if he had ever seen a bishop, and who replied that he did not know; that he might have seen one, and thought he was only a common man. Shakespeare's ecclesiastics cannot awaken religious enthusiasm. They illustrate the weakness of the clerical character without its strength. They command the respect

due to their official position, but nothing more. Sometimes they are weak, sometimes they are wicked, and if a man were to derive his sole conception of the Church from Shakespeare he would be justified in holding it in slight regard. Neither Cardinal Beaufort, with his arrogance, nor Parson Evans, with his loose companions, could lift men to a higher plane of thought and action. And the Church's defenders do it more harm than good, as when we find the tipsy Sir Andrew Aguecheek threatening to beat Malvolio like a dog because he is a Puritan.

These are some of the ways in which Religion is wont to manifest itself, along which Shakespeare has not followed. But we have not yet exhausted Religion's scope. It calls no doubt for prayer and preaching, for creeds and churches, and one who should deny this might well be set down, not only as unreligious, but as irreligious. But Shakespeare denies none of these. Rather, he takes them all for granted, and then goes about that which is his chief concern. He has not much to say of the relation which man holds to God, but he shows us in a thousand ways his relation to his neighbor.

He does not exhort to the performance of duty, but he paints conscience at its work as no professional preacher has ever done. The future life does not enter very much into the plan of his work, but no man has depicted the present life with greater fidelity to truth. It is a mistake to suppose that the mystic, the ecclesiastic, the theologian, and the exhorter divide between them all that could properly be called Religion. When St. James attempted to define it in short compass he passed beyond these regions. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world." This, of course, is a personal formula, to regulate one's conduct from day to day. But it is quite capable of wider adaptation, and when we apply it to literary work it seems to be a call to sympathy and to proportion. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations." This was the cry of the ancient prophet, and it is what our greatest poet is forever compelling us to do. He lifts the clouds, and broadens our horizon. He opens our eyes so that we have clear vision where

before we had seen men but as trees walking. He sets things in their right perspective so far as he deals with them at all. He takes possession of the imagination, and makes its desolate cities to be inhabited. We cannot say of him that he is a poet of the Church, or of the soul, but his field is the world, without which Church and soul alike could have no place. If Religion be confined to the Thirty-Nine Articles or the Westminster Confession, Shakespeare is not religious. If God absents Himself from the world except on Sundays, and even then does not venture forth beyond church-doors, Shakespeare is not religious. If Religion means severity towards weakness, and crossing the street that one's eyes may not be offended by the sight of some common wayfarer, Shakespeare is not religious. But if Religion, besides those accepted meanings where Shakespeare does not pretend to follow very far, means also to have a sane and far-reaching outlook upon life; to have broad sympathy with those who, in all their weakness and temptation, are yet God's children; to know good from evil, and light from darkness; to point out that the wages of sin is death, even though it be done sometimes

in merry mood; if it is religious to cherish friends, and to be glad at love received or given; if it is religious to see in past and present, in history and in life, the working of the hand of God; then Shakespeare is religious. It does not matter that he does not preach. After all, there are better places than the stage for that. It does not matter that he is not a creedmaker. That has always been a dangerous business, and is so still. If we seek for aids to devotion, we may read the "Pilgrim's Progress," or the "Imitation of Christ." But Shakespeare, as no other man has ever done, points out for us the religion that cannot be separated from common life.

Where Shakespeare planted, later poets have reaped. Some used his thoughts, some used his words, in some it is not easy to trace his influence directly, but we are none the less sure that it is there. He is the gate through which all who would enter the enchanted fields must pass. After his death, and Milton's, there was a long interval during which the Muse of Poetry refrained her soul, and kept it low. But in the nineteenth century the former sluggishness was followed by a time of great activity in England, along all lines. The stage-

coach and the tallow candle gave way before the miracles of modern science. In the Church, the Oxford Movement of 1833 stirred men's hearts, and twenty years later Maurice and Robertson and Kingsley quickened their minds. Poetry entered vigorously into this new life. There was Burns, bringing a nation to the consciousness of itself with his homely "Westlan' jingle;" and Scott, writing as if to the sound of martial music; and Byron, picturing in charming style the joys of hopelessness; and Coleridge, saying indeed in verse not many things, but much. Keats brought to modern England something of the atmosphere of ancient Greece, and Shelley was idol or bugbear, according to men's point of view. But in that path where Poetry and Religion walk together, the first great poet of this new time was William Wordsworth.

As with every other poet, there are many times when Wordsworth is not at his best. He is encumbered with a great deal of literary baggage, as Matthew Arnold called it. Sometimes he is pompous, sometimes he is intolerably dull, sometimes his simplicity becomes grotesque. We feel that the horse who raised hoof after hoof, and never stopped,

might have belonged to "Alice in Wonderland." Strorks the rhinoceros and Rikki-tikki-tavi the mongoose each has his place in his own kind of literature, but the Ass who is the joint-hero in "Peter Bell" is treated too seriously by the poet for the rest of us to accord him the respect which he deserves.

But it is ill business to dwell on defects when so many and so great virtues lie ready to our hand. That Wordsworth is often dull means nothing. In the first place, he was born into a dull and wooden world, though it was by no means dull and wooden when he left it. Again, he was a teacher always. He wishes to be considered that or nothing. And dulness, in some sort, must be the teacher's privilege and prerogative, unless the school-time is to be one long holiday. Wordsworth's explicit account of his poetry is that it is "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." All this is edifying, but if it be compared with the adventures of Achilles or of Don Juan, on their own terms, it must suffer by the comparison.

Comparison of this sort, however, is absurd. Wordsworth has scant respect for those who are heroes by profession. It is the adventure of the mind, not of the body, for which he cares. The atmosphere of his work is quiet to the very last degree. In "The Excursion," for example, the poet's whole purpose is not only ethical, but sacramental.

"Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And Melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
Of blessed consolations in distress;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;"

these things, and others like them, are the announced subjects of the poem. The very scenery is set against a religious background. We read of Hebrew prophets and the Scottish Church, of the lonely chapel in the dale, the churchyard among the mountains, the pastor, who "chose the calm delights of unambitious piety, and learning's solid dignity." There is the poet's thanksgiving for his own peaceful lot. He is a man "of cheerful yesterdays and confident to-morrows;" no doubt because his mind is richly stored, and he has no leanings toward "the tedium of fantastic idleness." There is the propounding of those questions which men have always

asked, which the pastor answers with mild orthodoxy. There are musings over the quiet resting-places of the dead. There is the looking forward and the looking back, that idea of the power of the past over the present, of the unity and solidarity of life, of the connection of things and thoughts with one another, which we find appearing in all of Wordsworth's poetry in the most unlooked for ways and places, and which is raised to its highest terms, and developed with surpassing beauty, in the famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood."

In Wordsworth's articles of poetic faith there are two main doctrines. One is the sacredness and living power of Nature. The other is the worth of Man. As with many another preacher, his teaching is often most valuable when it is least obvious. The "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" are ecclesiastical, and the "Lines written at Tintern Abbey" are not. But it is "Tintern Abbey" that shows us the depths of the poet's religious nature.

These two ideas of his often blend into one another, and become the two sides of one great truth. To say that Wordsworth loved the country, as

Virgil loved it, would be far too little. Its charms were ever with him, "a note of enchantment" amid the most unlovely scenes. To Wordsworth Nature was more than dear. She was holy. For those who were blind to her, who looked upon her as a stranger and an alien, no condemnation could be too severe.

"Great God. I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

But of Wordsworth himself it could never be said that he saw little in Nature that was his. He possessed her, and he was possessed by her in turn. There may be some to whom his enthusiasm for Nature will seem unnatural, if the expression be not too paradoxical. No man can escape altogether from the influence of his environment, and the dweller in dingy city streets, to whom the country is only so much space that separates him from another city, may find it impossible even to understand the poet's feelings. If this be so, it is the reader's misfortune, and not the poet's fault. Again,

there have been those who have called Wordsworth's teaching concerning Nature Pantheism, the losing of God through identifying Him with His creation. But is not Pantheism one of those vague names which men use when they wish to cast blame upon what they understand imperfectly, or what they do not understand at all? There is a class of words which we are wont to employ, to use Kipling's phrase, to "make a magic." Unitarian is such a word. There were some, of great ingenuity and highly developed imaginative powers, who applied it to Phillips Brooks. His thoughts were not their thoughts, his point of view was not their point of view, and, although nothing could be clearer than his published utterances regarding the Divinity of Christ, Unitarian served as a convenient epithet of reproach. Ritualist, with some, is such a word; and Latitudinarian, with others. Higher Criticism is a phrase that can throw into hysterics the ignorant pious of a certain type. They delight in speaking of it as the "so-called Higher Criticism," as if one were to speak of a so-called horse, or a so-called chair, or a so-called sunrise. They do not know that it may be the most innocent thing in the world.

Pantheism belongs to the same class. It may, no doubt, mean something most unpleasant and most reprehensible. It may mean nothing at all. In Wordsworth's case, whatever may be his thought of Nature, his poems on other subjects must acquit him of the charge of losing sight of the personality of God.

But Nature, with all his reverence and affection for it, is only half of Wordsworth's mental store. It involves the recognition of God, but the world must be a lonely place until we take account in it of men of like passions with ourselves. We cannot love the unseen God unless we love the brothers who are all about us. And Wordsworth never speaks more lovingly of Nature, and with a keener and deeper appreciation of her power, than when he makes her "fall back into a second place," and recognizes frankly that she is not the end of life, that she is not, to put it into theological phrase, sufficient for salvation. Though she has life in herself, it needs to be supplemented by another kind of life. We come then to the poet's second doctrine, of the worth of Man. He is no aristocrat. The obscure man, the unfortunate man, the simple child, all

draw their breath from God. He cares nothing for those accidental trappings with which some men are clothed. He does not call it high life when he means high living, nor talk about the lower classes when he means the poor. There are none of those lords and ladies in his poems who walk with so much dignity through Shakespeare's pages. Indeed, it seems as if he took pains to go to the opposite extreme. The Idiot Boy, the Cumberland Beggar, Michael the old shepherd, "the miserable mother by the Thorn," — he asks our interest in these and our sympathy for them, and just as much of it as Shakespeare could have asked for King Lear, or the Greek poets for the "dark sorrows of the line of Thebes." It is the hidden man of the heart with which he is concerned; and where this can be found, he feels it infinitely valuable. Perhaps the one poem of Wordsworth that everybody knows is "We are Seven." It makes no difference that two of them lie in the churchyard. As another poet puts it, "love is love forevermore." And this profoundest lesson that man can learn comes from a little child. There are very few characters in poetic literature who can hold as high a place as

the nameless lad, the companion of the poet's early days, in the short story of whose life the power of Nature and the dignity of the simplest human experience are brought together.

“There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye Cliffs
And islands of Winander. Many a time,
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him. And they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call; with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
Of mirth and jocund din. And, when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind

With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

“This Boy was taken from his Mates, and died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.
Fair is the spot, most beautiful the Vale
Where he was born; the grassy Churchyard hangs
Upon a slope above the village school;
And through that Churchyard when my way has led
At evening, I believe that oftentimes
A long half-hour together have I stood
Mute— looking at the grave in which he lies.”

Shakespeare is the great capitalist of poetic thought. Wordsworth is provincial, but his province is among the fairest known to men. It is at a great distance that Matthew Arnold follows these, but still he does follow. His range of thought is limited, his mastery of words is not remarkable. His poetry was an accident, we might almost say an incident, in his life. The cares of this world came between him and the Muse. The deceitfulness of riches did not much trouble him, but the pinch of poverty was only avoided by hard and most prosaic work. Most of his poetry was written

in his youth. For years he turned away from it, and spent his intellectual substance along other lines. We must make allowance for these things when we come to estimate his poetic worth. He is no epoch-maker, no miracle of genius. But in his own sphere he is a poet of wonderful sweetness, and if he has not much light to cast upon the problems that vex humanity he is not content with darkness, but is always seeking, even though he does not find.

Matthew Arnold the critic helps us to an understanding of Matthew Arnold the poet. He is not exactly anxious and worried about many things,—that is not his way,—but there are many things about which he is concerned. He goes down to the sea in ships and does business in great waters; and sometimes he is out of sight of land, and those who follow blindly must be sore distressed. But back of all that lightning play of wit, and back of those reforming schemes of his, half playful and half serious, by which Nonconformists were to be taught the unloveliness of their clamor for “the dissidence of Dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion,” and bishops were to be made

more reasonable, and the awful flatness of Philistinism was to be seasoned with a little pinch of Attic salt, lies something else. These may receive the attention of Matthew Arnold in the world, but his true home is in

“that sweet city with her dreaming spires,
Who needs not June for beauty’s heightening.”

With all his special pleading and his agitation, he does not care about bringing men to see things with his eyes; or rather, if there is spiritual agreement, he is content to let intellectual agreement go. Theological sympathy with Newman he had none whatever, nor could he have had at any time. But that did not prevent him from seeing in Newman the most fascinating figure of his day. Those high gifts, that splendid hope which ended in such bitter disappointment, that funeral sermon preached by the dead man over the grave of all that he had been, that hiding of light under a bushel which is such a heavy indictment against the Church of Rome, that old man who had been a leader in the early days of the century, and who survived, in a sort of double exile, almost to its end — this is a history

which might move any man. It moved Arnold deeply. If he had a keen eye for intellectual weakness, or what he considered intellectual weakness, he had a keen eye too for spiritual beauty. He preferred such beauty, even though it might be in error, to those glaring virtues which, rightly or wrongly, he attributed to the Puritans and their ecclesiastical descendants, and which make their possessors — Arnold would almost have said their victims — so difficult to deal with at times. As he felt about Newman, so was it with Oxford also. She was the “home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible loyalties.” So be it. But because she was the queen of romance, she must be the city of the soul.

Some one has spoken of Arnold’s system as Anglicanism minus Christianity. Minus Christianity of a certain sort it is indeed, but if the letter is lacking the spirit is present in no small measure. He is like that man in Scripture who said he would not go, but did go, nevertheless. He declares his unbelief, or rather his non-belief; he insists upon his uncertainty with a dogmatism equal to that of the Athanasian Creed itself; he denies absolutely the Divinity of Christ, as

the Church has always held it,— and then he substitutes for it a divinity in Christ which it is even harder to account for or to understand. After the process described by Bishop Butler, by which anything can be made anything, he is by no means without skill in making something nothing. He sees so clearly that he does not see far. He possesses, to use one of his own expressions, a “sad lucidity of soul.” He sees the weakness of human nature, and guesses at its strength. He sees unloveliness,— the truss factory occupying the finest site in England, the College of Health, with the beasts which are probably lions, in the New Road,— and he gives to these an attention to which they really have no claim. He sees a theological system which he could never have constructed, and he lays hold of the mistakes of its adherents to pull it down. With a lack of imagination not to be looked for in a poet, he asks for proof of God. He seems to forget that the highest things in life do not come to us by proof, that faith is quite as real a power. But we cannot read his poetry without feeling that he knows more of God than he is willing to confess.

To a heart naturally Christian — he has “so

much unlearnt, so much resigned" — there is added a restless and inconclusive mind. He has always a compass, pointing fixedly to the pole-star of righteousness, but there are many times when he seems to be without a destination. He visits the Carthusian Monastery on the Grande Chartreuse.

"Waiting between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth, I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride —
I come to shed them at their side."

Then, after a little, he goes on.

"Achilles ponders in his tent,
The kings of modern thought are dumb;
Silent they are, though not content,
And wait to see the future come.
They have the grief men had of yore,
But they contend and cry no more.

"Our fathers watered with their tears
This sea of time whereon we sail;
Their voices were in all men's ears
Who passed within their puissant hail.
Still the same ocean round us raves,
But we stand mute, and watch the waves."

Here is hopelessness indeed, but hopeless is something that Matthew Arnold cannot be. He looks to Wordsworth, and "the freshness of the early world," rather than to Byron, who bears about "the pageant of his bleeding heart." Now and again, he prepares some situation of deep despondency, and then he escapes from it with a happy smile. He insists that he does not know, but he has an enviable power of suggesting glorious things which has led to some of his noblest work. He is like one of his own sonnets, in which he describes Tertullian's stern sentence that there could be no forgiveness for those who had sinned after baptism.

"He saves the sheep, the goats He does not save."

The Church listened, and made no denial. But then

"she smiled; and in the Catacombs,
With eye suffused, but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid
Her head 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs,
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—
And on His shoulders, not a lamb, a kid."

It is very much so with Matthew Arnold. Though he declares that his subject is sadness and uncertainty,

somehow or other it often issues in joy and hope. This is done by subtle suggestion, rather than by direct assertion. There is nothing to relieve the gloom, but the gloom is relieved. There is no word of God, but a mysterious spirit broods over the earth, and brings peace. The poet has been picturing the wreck of things. Then he looks away —

“And glorious there without a sound,
Across the glimmering lake,
High in the Valais-depth profound,
I saw the morning break.”

It is but a touch. It has no connection with anything that has gone before. But it carries with it a hope that no argument could demolish, before which despondency must fade away.

But there is something more than this hopeful hopelessness, this glad melancholy. If there is much that we cannot know, if “the night wind brings up the stream” only “murmurs and scents of the infinite sea,” there is something that we can know, and that we must know, if we are to learn to know ourselves. We have the power, even though it be with many hindrances, to help and to give light to one another. This is the thought of the beautiful

little poem on "Dover Beach," — the brooding mystery of life, the removal of those things that can be shaken as of things that are made, but with it all the strength and glory of human companionship and love. Perhaps Arnold's uncertainty is never more certain of the worst, his melancholy never more fully developed, than in this poem. But though Faith is disappearing, Love remains. Again and again, he returns to this refuge. Where Love is present, it answers those questions which otherwise might be forever asked in vain.

"Then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes."

The noble lines in memory of his father, Thomas Arnold, written at Rugby Chapel, with which that father must always be so closely associated, are little more than a variation and an elaboration of the same theme. Man is in need of help. His stronger brother brings him the help he needs. This power of rescue helps us to realize the dignity of man. It helps us to realize that faith of which the present holds such slender store. So, like his own Scholar Gipsy, Arnold goes his way —

“Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade.”

When now we pass from Matthew Arnold on to Tennyson, we find that Faith and Love are still the chief subjects of our poet's thought. But Faith is no longer in eclipse. There are those, indeed, who have not hesitated to speak of Tennyson as an agnostic. It is true that he has not done the Apostles' Creed into verse. He is not one of those dangerous and intolerable persons who choose to regard themselves as depositaries of the sum of human knowledge. With him, as with St. Paul, there are limits to what he knows; though, like St. Paul again, he hopes to know more by-and-by. But, since he is not a teacher of dogmatic theology but a poet, he knows all that there is need for him to know.

The worth of Love — how Tennyson dwells upon it, and lets it blaze forth from one brilliant setting after another. It is native to the golden clime in which the poet was born. It transforms the Princess from a fascinating anomaly into a creature of flesh and blood. The cunning brain is become a living soul. It lifts Maud's crack-brained lover out of himself, and turns his morbid reveries and dreary

speculations into exquisite melody. It stands out through the pessimism and despair of "Locksley Hall." In "The Two Voices" it was the sight of father and mother, secure in their double love, and in the love of the little maiden by their side, that put gloom and hopelessness to flight; that made the creeping minutes become the bounteous hours, and satisfied the soul that, though the old problems and the old confusion might remain, God's everlasting arms were underneath.

This is Love at holiday. But in the storms of life, when fierce winds sweep down across bleak ice-fields, it has an equally important part to play. It is sometimes said that Tennyson lacks dramatic power, and no doubt his plays, with all their cunning workmanship and skilful elaboration, give color to the assertion. They compel our admiration of the author, but the characters themselves do not very greatly move us. But if he cannot, like Shakespeare, create men and women of real flesh and blood and make them live their lives before us, he can lay hold of critical moments, and paint them with a brilliancy which almost blinds our eyes with light. The short poem "Rizpah" is but one example out of many.

It is the word of an old woman, whose son has been hanged in chains, to a charitably-disposed visitor who has come to administer comfort and what she seems to regard as orthodox instruction of a suitable and timely sort. There is not one word of direct description in the poem. From beginning to end it is the monologue of a crushed and broken soul, to whom love, and hopeless love, is the one thing left in all the world. It is not the love which may receive as well as give. It is not love which can look forward, it is hardly love which can look back. It is not based on worth, and happiness of any sort bears no relation to it. But it glorifies the grim surroundings, and blots out the shame. Love claims boldly, where even Faith hesitates.

“Heard, have you? What? They have told you he never repented his sin?

How do they know it? Are they his mother? Are you of his kin?

“Heard. Have you ever heard when the storm on the downs began,

The wind that 'ill wail like a child, and the sea that 'ill moan like a man?

“Election, Election, and Reprobation — it's all very well. But I go to-night to my boy, and I shall not find him in Hell.”

And the love that must have seemed to men so unavailing passed to other regions where man's judgment counts for even less than it does here.

But after all it is not in poems like this that Tennyson shows us the exceeding worth of love. Here we have love spending itself, as it were, upon its object. But in other ways he shows us how it lifts men out of themselves, and gives them a broader outlook and a larger life. The opposite of love is selfishness, and in the "Palace of Art" we have a picture of selfishness raised to its highest terms, and tricked out in all its most entrancing garments. It is the world at its very best, with love eliminated. Never were more favorable conditions, never was selfishness equipped with more magnificence. Cameo follows cameo, as the poet unfolds those things which make the palace's beauty. There are cool green courts and cloisters and galleries and fountains and statues and deep-set windows and corridors and rooms great and small,

"each a perfect whole
From living Nature, fit for every mood
And change of my still soul."

There are landscapes and legends, and paintings of the wise men of old. There are even angels bearing

gifts — beautiful angels, to delight the eye. In choice mosaic, cycles of human history are worked out. And there the soul, intent upon herself and careless of all else, held her high court. Her separation was her glory. She needed nothing. Was she not complete? She gazed with contempt and loathing upon those who were less fortunate or learned than herself. They were but “darkening droves of swine.” This is her attitude, — a looker-on at life, a patron, but a patron for no other purpose than the augmentation of her own dignity and grandeur, a superior being not to be annoyed nor disturbed by the common cares of men. But she could not hold it. She lacked the one thing that makes the difference between death and life. It is only dead men who can be, in any real sense, exclusive. In spite of herself, she was forced to look beyond herself. No less skilfully than when he reared for her the walls of the palace, the poet describes her fall. In all God’s universe, so strongly knit together, that soul stands alone.

“A spot of dull stagnation, without light
Or power of movement, seemed my soul,
'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite
Making for one sure goal.

“A still salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,
Left on the shore; that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white.

“Back on herself her serpent pride had curled.
‘No voice,’ she shrieked in that lone hall,
‘No voice breaks through the stillness of this world;
One deep, deep silence all.’

“She, mouldering with the dull earth’s mouldering sod,
Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame,
Lay there exiled from eternal God,
Lost to her place and name;

“And death and life she hated equally,
And nothing saw, for her despair,
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
No comfort anywhere.

“She howled aloud, ‘I am on fire within.’
There comes no murmur of reply.
‘What is it that will take away my sin,
And save me lest I die?’ ”

To a question like this, and from a poet like Tennyson, there could be but one answer, just as there could be but one answer from the Gospel. It is he who is willing to lose his life who saves it, it is

he who seeks that finds, it is not when he is alone but when he sees himself reflected in a brother's eye that a man may come to know himself for what he is. There is no sin in the beauty of the palace. Let that remain. The sin lies in the proud and self-sufficient soul.

“So when four years were wholly finished
She threw her royal robes away.

‘Make me a cottage in the vale,’ she said,
‘Where I may mourn and pray.

““ Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
So lightly, beautifully built;
Perchance I may return with others there
When I have purged my guilt.””

“With others” — this marks the difference between happiness and despair, between love and selfishness, between human righteousness and sin. The apostle struck one of the deepest notes of God's way of dealing with the world, when, at the end of his history of faith, he adds that “they, without us, should not be made perfect.” That no man lives to himself nor dies to himself is more than a truth of ethics. It is a fact of life.

We have seen that life without love, with self as its

sole object, is but the delirium of madness. Where love fails and falters, life fails and falters too, as in the departure of Guinevere from King Arthur's court. But where love is strong and deep and true it fills life with glory and with a joy against which even death is powerless.

“*T* is better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

More than any other poet, we must associate Tennyson with the eulogy of such a love. In 1833 Arthur Henry Hallam died at Vienna, at the age of twenty-two. He was buried in the little church which Tennyson describes, at the meeting of the Severn and the Wye. A tablet marks his resting-place, and in tender Latin records the grief of those he left behind.

“*Vale Dulcissime; Vale Delectissime Desideratissime.*”

Hallam was Tennyson's friend. Men have questioned sometimes whether he was worthy of the monument of verse which the poet has raised to him in “*In Memoriam.*” But it is a foolish question and an unnecessary one, even an unworthy one. Perish the thought that those who love us should estimate our merits too carefully in accordance with our just

deserts. It would fare ill with the best and brightest if there were not some to exaggerate their abilities and their virtues, and to pass by their deficiencies with unseeing eyes. When Tennyson writes of "his friend, the brother of his love," no doubt he sees there what must have been hidden from the world. What the world might have seen in later years is an academic question which cannot possibly be answered. Meanwhile, we have a strong and tender soul telling us of his love and of his loss. If it is on the note of grief that the poem begins, other and sweeter notes soon enter in. Time has not conquered love, but it has brought a change. The earth is no longer hung in black, for it is love rather than grief that shows endurance. That cannot darken life, with whatever weight of grief it may be mixed. Rather, it makes life, and lightens its burdens, and smooths away its cares. It brings new treasures to heart and mind and soul. It explains, and brightens, and ennobles. It is immortal and eternal.

"Love is and was my Lord and King,
And in his presence I attend
To hear the tidings of my friend
Which every hour his couriers bring.

“Love is and was my King and Lord,
And will be, though as yet I keep
Within his court on earth, and sleep
Encompassed by his faithful guard,

“And hear at times a sentinel
Who moves about from place to place,
And whispers to the worlds of space,
In the deep night, that all is well.”

This is the worth of love, the love of our own kind, for the love of God is not the poet’s subject. But love of wife, and child, and friend, needs something more to give it firmness and security. The changes and chances of this mortal life might overcome it if it stood quite alone. And so to the strength and force of love which the poet delights to set forth, he adds the worth of faith. Earth must point to heaven or else to the absence of heaven, which is hell. One cannot deal with man, and not sooner or later come to God. And when one deals with man on his highest side, as Tennyson does, God must be near.

Sermons on faith are apt to be uninteresting. Perhaps they approach it too generally from its philosophical side. They do not realize its excessive naturalness, its extreme simplicity. They are in-

clined to urge as a duty what is, to a very great extent, inevitable. Now and then, it almost seems as if there were men who were trying to apologize for it. But faith does not need apology. Without it, life is materialism, a brutal mixture of gold, and brass, and iron, and strong flint. To Tennyson, faith is the invincible assurance that there is One who sees our needs, whose ears are open to our prayers. If love has seemed to fail us, faith comes to the rescue. It is not a thick-skinned and weak-minded optimism, which denies the reality of the evil that is in the world. It does not dismiss things that are hard to be understood as unworthy of any consideration. But always, amidst whatever perplexities and whatever troubles, it can discern upon

“the low, dark verge of life,
The twilight of eternal day.”

It is a faculty of the soul rather than of the mind, to be felt, and not to be defined with over-zealous care. It is very far removed from dogmatism. But such as it is, it is no less real and indispensable than love itself. The poet has lost his friend, but he will not be the fool of loss. Death has had power to change

the current of his life. He recognizes that, of course. But to the one whom it has taken, he cannot but believe that death has brought its gains. The much-beloved is becoming "a lord of large experience," that by-and-by he may teach those whom he has preceded. The loss may be described and measured, but the gain is not done away with because it cannot be set down in terms of human speech. Faith leads men from grief and despondency to hope and cheer. It is indestructible and inextinguishable. No argument can prevail against it, no contradiction prove it groundless.

Before three generations Tennyson set forth these truths. In one poem after another we find the same love of love, the same trust in faith, the same consciousness of God's besetting presence in the world, which make the very bone and sinew of his work. He has no formal creed to present, but he deals with that in man which make creeds possible. And at the last there is no weariness, no mournful reverie. For the old man, close to his journey's end, there are still "so many worlds, so much to do." He is not old. He is young again, and the future stretches away before him, sealed by faith and love.

“When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
Brings the Dreams about my bed,
Call me not so often back,
Silent Voices of the dead,
Toward the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone.
Call me rather, silent voices,
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me,
On, and always on.”

These are the men with whom Robert Browning must naturally be compared. There are ways in which he excels them all; there are other ways, no doubt, in which they all surpass him. There is no poet about whom so many contradictory things can be said, and said with truth. One of the cleverest of the many clever people who have written about him illustrates his many-sided conception of the universe by the old story of five blind men who found themselves within reach of an elephant. One of them put his arms about its leg, and declared at once that an elephant was just a kind of tree. Another seized its wriggling, waving trunk, and fled in terror from what he supposed must be a serpent. Another, taller perhaps, or coming from a different quarter,

leaned against its side, and was satisfied that an elephant was like a wall. The man who approached it from the rear, and made its acquaintance by getting hold of its tail, insisted that it was a rope; and the man who ran into its tusk was certain that it was a sharp and heavy spear. All of these men had excellent reasons for the conclusions at which they had arrived. At the same time, those who are familiar with elephants must feel that such descriptions, however true so far as they go, still leave a great deal to be supplied. In this strange world of ours it is not often that the utterance of a single undisputed and indisputable truth is all that is needed upon any subject. The smallest things are far too big for any such short and easy method, the simplest things are far too complicated. And an elephant is neither small nor simple.

The same old fable applies most admirably to Browning himself and the things that men have said of him, — men who have grasped the obvious and are content to go no farther. Here comes one, — a blind man, surely, but yet a blind man whose hand has touch of truth — and tells us that the poet is tedious. If he points in proof to some of the dramas,

or to a poem like "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," with all its subtle insight into queer human nature, the most enthusiastic disciple can at least see what he means. Another thinks that Browning is fantastic and grotesque. Where he attracts, where he finds spiritual kinship — and the relations of a genius may be very ordinary people, after all — he binds his kindred to him heart and soul, deep calling unto deep. But where he offends, he offends mightily. There are excellent people who take too seriously his pleasantries about Hobbs and Nobbs, and Nokes and Stokes, who insist on treating his asides as if they were the staple of his conversation. It is irreverent, of course, to laugh in church, but there are times when laughter is not only innocent, but praiseworthy. Nor is it a monopoly of those who do nothing else. Then it becomes imbecile. Browning can be grotesque, or he never could have written "Pacchiarotto;" and sometimes grotesqueness jostles elbows unpleasantly with the sublime. But we must remember that the tail which the blind man took for the whole elephant, though it was a real tail, yet gave a most misleading and incomplete impression. The elephant was tail, and something more.

Another literary offence with which Browning is often charged is pedantry. It is true, he knows more words than the dictionary, and more facts than the encyclopædia, but he uses these words and facts as if the whole world knew them as well as he. It is a temptation of the ignorant to mistake knowledge for assumption, to make no distinction between the possession of a thing and the vulgar desire to show it off. But while Browning's range of knowledge is tremendous, he never seems conscious of superiority. It does not seem to occur to him that everyone does not know just what is Saponian strength, or just who was George Bubb Dodington. He takes a great deal for granted, both in his readers, and in his poems themselves. Again and again he flings us into the thick of things, without a word to help us to discover where we are. He tells us plainly that his poems were never meant to take the place of a cigar or an after-dinner nap. If any man will read them, he must work for them. But this is not pedantry, any more than trigonometry is pedantry. A charge that carries much more weight is that of obscurity. That there are times when Browning is obscure cannot be denied. We are told that Mrs. Carlyle wrote that

she had read "Sordello" with much interest, and wanted to know whether Sordello was a man, or a city, or a book. He piles his facts up, Pelion upon Ossa, and then he sets strange words playing hide-and-seek with one another. If he were writing sermons for a congregation which, once inside the church-door, could not escape, or if he were teaching children too small to consult the unabridged dictionary, this obscurity might be a serious matter. But in a poet with a message for those who have ears to hear, but not with the burden laid upon him of providing ears for those who have them not, this is not the sin which is without forgiveness. It ought not to be hard to say nothing luminously. If a man has so much to say that thought and language cannot always keep step together, we ought not to complain that his mind is so fertile that a few tares are mingled with the wheat. Whoever takes pains with Browning will find that his pains will bring him an exceeding great reward. It is easy to point out flaws in his workmanship. But whoever is moved by "the mighty hopes that make us men," whoever is stirred by the thousand questions that give to life its interest, must praise his work.

CHAPTER IV

ISAIAH AND BROWNING

POETRY and Prophecy have not the same birthplace nor the same history, but in the hands of the masters there comes a time when they are bound to meet. It may be said of Isaiah, without much fear of contradiction, that he was the greatest prophet which the Hebrew race produced. Browning's position, of course, is a much less undisputed one, but, whatever might be urged against him, there are none who would venture to deny his intellectual power. Without entering into that dangerous region where comparatives are made to issue in superlatives, it may not be too much to say that he had a keener mind, a more subtle discernment of that which is in man, than any English-speaking poet since Shakespeare.

Between prophet and poet there lies an interval of twenty-five hundred years. One was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a dweller in Jerusalem through a long

life, a student of contemporary politics, intensely interested in the events of his own day, a man with understanding of the times, who passed his days in the service of his generation. Any attempt to make Isaiah modern could only end in dismal failure. The other was an Englishman, but an Englishman who liked his England at a distance, and who turned away from it to do his work; a man whose spirit was always of the nineteenth century, at whatever period the scenes of his poems might be laid. The very fact that the contrast between them is so glaring makes their resemblances the more remarkable. We may confine ourselves at present to a temperamental likeness between poet and prophet, a similarity of method rather than of thought.

The word "strenuous" has many modern associations, but the thing which it describes is not a modern thing, and we may say of Isaiah that he was distinctly a prophet of the strenuous life. He is "very bold" and vigorous in what he has to say. He has no patience with Ahaz' weakness. He will not listen to the plans of his countrymen for escaping from one foe by calling another to their aid. Let them fight their own battles. They will find God's help enough.

When he rebukes, he uses words which could not possibly be misunderstood. The drunkards of Ephraim, the ladies of the smart set who wore their finery at Ahaz' court, must have been dull indeed if they were ignorant of what the prophet thought of them. But when he paints those glowing pictures of a redeemed city, his language is hardly less intense. His faith is of the kind that removes mountains. It overleaps all barriers, it knows no obstacles. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

This same intensity we find in Browning. Though he is a poet, he builds no castles in the air. The possible has for him a sacredness which the impossible, however brilliant or desirable, could never have. It is this upon which Bishop Blougram insists with so much clever subtleness.

“The common problem, yours, mine, every one’s,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,— but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means; a very different thing.”

But the limits of the possible must not be too easily marked out, as Blougram himself, for all his worldly

wisdom and his easy accommodation to conditions, hastens to set forth. Something must be conceded to circumstances, but circumstances cannot be allowed to make the man.

“No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man’s worth something. God stoops o’er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet,— both tug;
He’s left, himself, i’ the middle; the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life.
Never leave growing till the life to come.”

This is the poet’s contention in a hundred ways. The poet Eglamor dies of the trifling perfection of his work. It was just because he took things so easily that Sordello failed. He would not do evil, but he did not like to take the trouble to do good. He had a “strange disbelief that aught was ever to be done.” For him to be what he might have been seemed a step “too mean to take,” and so he never took it.

“”T was a fit
He wished should go to him, not he to it.”

He wanted to seem, rather than to be. He was content to doze at home, if only men thought that he was singing or fighting somewhere else.

“A sorry farce
Such life is, after all.”

This is the poet's conclusion. For with him life is for action, not for criticism. This is the cry that goes up from all sorts and conditions of the men and women who figure in his pages. If life is thought of as a game, it is a game to be played hard, to be thoroughly enjoyed.

“How sad and bad and mad it was,
But then, how it was sweet! ”

If it is a voyage, it must be undertaken at whatever risk or inconvenience. If it is a cup, it must be filled and drained. If it is a battle, it must be fought to the end, however hot the sun, and thick the smoke, and close the bullets. And so we find his poems filled with characters who feel, and feel intensely, and do what they do with all the vigor of which a man is capable. The monk in the Spanish cloister hates his fellow, and he puts into that hatred a force which, if it could have been caught and tamed, might have made him a Saint Paul.

“Gr-r-r! there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!

If hate killed men, Brother Laurence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!"

Johannes Agricola meditates upon God. There is something sublime in the assurance with which he takes possession of the Divine decrees, and puts himself at the very centre of the universe. The rest of the world he dismisses with an indifferent sentence. They are as may be, many of them

"in hell's fierce bed,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness."

It is nothing to him. That is God's work. For him —

"I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as He has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me, His child."

And so he is assured he cannot sin. He is to be guiltless forever, through the Divine predestination, "full-fed by unexhausted power to bless."

When Browning treats of love, there is the same abandonment, the same fulness of life.

“Be a god, and hold me
With a charm!

Be a man, and fold me
With thine arm!

“Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought.”

Love colors all the world. Where it is present, what does it matter if the skies are gray? But where it is absent, what can it profit though the skies be blue? Love is more than the victories and triumphs of the centuries. There are those lines that breathe the very breath of the Campagna, and that picture so vividly its ancient glory and its modern decay. This is the poem’s conclusion, — the poem’s, and the poet’s.

“In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky;

Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
Gold, of course.

Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth’s returns

For whole centuries of folly, noise, and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best."

We pass on from intensity of feeling to breadth of view, to wideness of horizon. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, but from Jerusalem he looked out over all the world. That was his business as a prophet. He was set upon a watch-tower, that he might declare what he saw. And he saw much. He was never of that melancholy company whose eyes reach only as far as the trough where they feed and the stable where they lie. He saw good, and he saw evil. In time of peace he could see the danger that threatened, though it was yet a long way off. In time of war he could look beyond the fighting and the fear. Nor was Jerusalem alone the object of his thought. There is a considerable portion of his book in which the scene is forever shifting, in which we need to be always accustoming ourselves to some new point of view. At one moment he is speaking of some great world-power, the next of some wandering tribe whose very name we hear for the first time. Although his interests are centred at Jerusalem, his long suc-

cession of oracles concerning foreign nations proves conclusively that they do not end there. In one reign after another, his place seems to have been very near the king. But he was familiar with the movement of the world, and it was a movement in which he himself felt called upon to take a part. For the very reason that he is a watchman, his gaze must be upon the nations round about. As he mounts his watch-tower, he hears the noise of storm and conflict. There is confusion worse confounded in the world. "Ah, the booming of the peoples, the multitudes, like the booming of the seas they boom; and the rushing of the nations, like the rushing of mighty waters they rush; nations, like the rushing of many waters they rush." The prophet is no idle spectator, who notes all this as a matter of curious information with which he has no personal concern. It is his business to bring some kind of order out of this chaos, to speak words of warning to those who are in need of warning, to send encouragement to those who are like men buffeted and driven by the winter sea. And so we have the burden of Babylon and Moab and Damascus, of Tyre and of Egypt; the prophet bears all these, whether for weal or woe.

No sturdier patriot ever lived, but his patriotism does not blind him to the fact that beyond Jerusalem there lies the world.

In this broadness of vision, Browning again stands by the prophet's side. It was said of the young Sordello, while he was still dreaming at Goito, and wondering what life might mean —

“Beyond the glades
Of the fir-forest border, and the rim
Of the low range of mountains, was for him
No other world.”

It could never have been said of Sordello's creator. Most poets have their own constituency of characters, so to speak, and work with these. They would not know what to do with other types. Wordsworth's interest in Goody Blake and Harry Gill, in Peter Bell and Michael and Lucy, was so great that it crowded out all whose lot was cast beyond his mountain valley. He aimed, no doubt, to be universal in his thought, but he was provincial in his illustrations. Tennyson is not at home except in England. It is hardly too much to say that the world ends for him at Dover Beach. Matthew Arnold is concerned chiefly with the depressed, though the remedies for

depression which he offers are pleasant to the taste rather than desirable for food. But Browning's constituency, like Shakespeare's, is the world. His range is wide as humanity itself. He is a man, and there is nothing human with which he has not some living sympathy. There is nothing exclusive in the interest with which he looks out upon the world. Congenial or uncongenial, good or bad, winning a measure of success or sinking into dismal failure, there is no man whom he does not find worth while. He tells us, at the beginning of "The Ring and the Book," of the finding of the old manuscript which gave him the foundation of his story. He was crossing the Square of San Lorenzo in Florence, and stopped before one of those street-stalls where almost anything that could possibly be sold may find a place. There were

‘Odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!) ”

There was a web of tapestry, now offered as a mat. There were books, long fallen from their best estate, and learning now that misery makes strange bedfellows. Perhaps Browning's range of view could be no better described than in just these lines, and others that are no less miscellaneous. He sees everything and he goes everywhere. Paracelsus' words might have been the poet's own —

“What oppressive joy was mine
When life grew plain, and I first viewed the thronged,
The everlasting concourse of mankind.”

And so we follow Waring from England to the uttermost parts of the earth. We see life in Greece and Israel, in France and Spain and Italy, three thousand years ago and yesterday. We rise to the heights, and we catch glimpses of the darkest corners of the soul. For poet, as for prophet, the world is large.

He who sees far is likely to see clearly too. Things group themselves before him, not in a confused and unmeaning mass, but in their right perspective and proportion. Isaiah looked about him, and he saw men whose views of life were distorted and perverse. They made a great deal of the outside of things, and

very little of their inner meaning. They were sticklers after the letter of the law, while they cared nothing for its spirit. They were terribly distressed at the empty threats of those who had no power to do them harm; but to the real danger of the time, the menace of Assyria or the guile of Egypt, they were blind and deaf. Some things they knew, but they did not know what was most worth the knowing. They did not consider. They would do anything rather than think. As Isaiah puts it, almost in so many words, there were times when they acted as if the God to whom they were content to give their patronage was a fool. The delusions and hallucinations of modern days were not yet born, but there were those with familiar spirits whom they loved to seek, and there were wizards who peeped and muttered. The people were prosperous enough,—too prosperous; for fulness of pocket may distract attention from emptiness of mind and heart. "Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." Wealth had become mere impudent materialism, opportunity was strangled at its birth, those who

should have been gentlemen and ladies were sots and clothes-horses. The prophet gives a list of the finery worn by the exclusive women of the court, who were "haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet," that he may set forth its worthlessness under such conditions. In the same way he catalogues the possession of the men upon which they pride themselves with such assurance. There are high towers and fenced walls. There are ships of Tarshish and pleasant pictures. There are idols of silver and idols of gold, which each one has made after his own fancy for himself to worship. But not one of these has any power of continuance. Already evil days are close at hand. "They shall look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness." In that day it is the Lord alone who shall be exalted, the Lord whom they have forgotten, and from whom they have turned away.

But while Isaiah draws this sombre picture of those who at the moment were wearing every outward mark of prosperity and success, we must not

think of him as one whose clearness of vision led him only to rub all the bright colors out from life. If he sees very plainly evil when it attempts to masquerade as good, he sees good also when it is hidden from every other eye. It is true that there was very little to be said in praise of those contemporaries of his of whom he speaks from time to time. But for Jerusalem itself he never gives up hope. The period of national security in which his earlier years were passed was followed by a time of restlessness and threatening danger. The Assyrians were at the city's very gates, demanding an entrance which it seemed impossible to prevent. There had been wild terror, followed by mad despair. With the people, there was fierce revelry. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." With the king, there was complete prostration. He covered himself with sackcloth and ashes, and waited what had to come. The messengers who had tried to purchase peace wept at their failure. There was no water for the city.

While Jerusalem is in this condition, out of this turmoil of fear and hideous uncertainty, Isaiah speaks, and passes it all by. He does not run away

from a task which is too great for him, as the king had done. He does not try to forget a trouble that he cannot heal, like the people who turned their panic into a feast. For long he had warned, and threatened, and pleaded, and prayed. The prophet of God, he had given himself up to his people, though they had shut their ears against him, and mocked him in the streets. Though he sees visions, he is no visionary. Because he is a man of God, he does not turn his back on the affairs of men. But now he thrusts aside the present, with its noisy insistence and its anxious cares. They have thought enough of these. Many and many a time he has counselled concerning them. But now, for Jerusalem, there is something more. The present distress, the assaults of enemies, the unworthiness of the inhabitants themselves, — none of these can blot out the fact that it is God's city, and so cannot be destroyed. And the prophet draws a picture very different from that which, at the moment, must have been before his eyes. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall

ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." Other nations have their natural defences, Egypt the Nile, Assyria the Euphrates; but they are more strongly guarded. "There the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby." The confusion that comes from many voices is at an end. There is but one voice, and all hasten to obey it. "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our king; He will save us." Beyond the weakness and the helplessness of men Isaiah sees the unchanging majesty of God.

This power of looking into the very depths of things may be regarded as part of the necessary equipment of a prophet. But if its possession indicates the power of prophesying, then Browning must be a prophet too. He is concerned with men and women of his own creation, but it is no surface knowledge of them that he gives. He sees them through and through. He tells us of what happens to them, but, more than that, he tells us what they are. It is little enough that he knows of the star that dartles the red and the blue, but it has opened

its soul to him, for all that. He can put himself in other people's places, and look at things from every point of view, as when, in "The Ring and the Book," he tells the same story a dozen times, always with the same facts, and always with a different atmosphere. The Pope sits in judgment on Guido Franceschini. He would show mercy if he dared. The weight of his six and fourscore years bears heavily upon him, and he knows that there is but a moment "while twilight lasts and time wherein to work." Though he is judge to-day, to-morrow he may himself be judged. He has worn through the dark winter day with winter in his soul beyond the world's. The more he reads of the documents which have been submitted to him, the more certain does he become of Guido's guilt.

"I find this black mark impinge the man,
That he believes in just the vile of life."

He studies the case with care and grave deliberation, but there is not a moment's hesitation as to his decision. He would not dare to die, if he should let Guido live. But it is not the Pope, nor the opposing lawyer, nor the victim, nor any of the witnesses of

the tragedy, who show us Guido at his worst. He must do that himself. Just as the Pope, in an act of severity, reveals his own gentleness of spirit, so does Guido, in his last appeal for mercy, sink to the very lowest depths. He has stormed and lied and blustered. He has rung the changes upon his cheap bids for sympathy and pity. A common cut-throat, he has grown eloquent as he described himself as a knight-errant. Now all that is past. The last appeal has been taken, and the time has come when he must pay the penalty. He has been a soldier. Just now he was praising the Athenian who died drinking hot bull's blood, worthy of a man. Surely, he will have no fear of death. But his orderly discourse becomes more and more fragmentary and disjointed until it ends in a very agony of terror.

"Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it Open they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,

Is— save me notwithstanding! Life is all.
I was just stark mad,— let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile.
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's,— no, I am the Pope's.
Abate,— Cardinal,— Christ,— Maria,— God. . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

The white light of Browning's genius shines into every nook and cavern of Guido's soul, and we know that this is the way that one who was a coward and a bully all his life long would feel in the presence of death.

But Browning, like Isaiah, can do more than search the depths of life. He can discern nobility where it might never have been guessed at. There could be no better example of this than the old Grammarian, who at first sight is very far from being an heroic figure. There were long years of toil, when no one ever heard his name. His youth went by. His eyes grew leaden, and then dross of lead. He was racked with pain and coughing. His work was dull. The settling Hoti's business cannot much stir the blood. There were those who would have called him from his task, but he would not so much

as listen to their words. This was the purpose that he set before him —

“That before living he ’d learn how to live —
 No end to learning;
Earn the means first, — God surely will contrive
 Use for our earning.”

And so he labored on, resting securely in this faith. The throttling hands of death surprised him while he was still intent upon the same dull task. There were many to whom it must have seemed a wasted and cheerless life. But not his disciples. They knew what it all meant, and why he left the world to take its way.

“Others mistrust and say, ‘But time escapes;
 Live now or never !’
He said, ‘What’s time? Leave Now for dogs and apes !
 Man has Forever.’ ”

And so, when at last the tired body was compelled to rest, his pupils bore him on their shoulders to the mountain top.

“Here’s the top peak; the multitude below
 Live, for they can, there;
This man decided not to live but Know—
 • Bury this man there?

Here— here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go. Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send.
Lofty designs must close in like effects;
Loftily lying,
Leave him— still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying."

It is as inevitable as Guido's panic frenzy. For such a man there could be no other burial-place.

So closely do poet and prophet come together in the ways in which they set about their work. With each of them there is the same enthusiasm of living, the same vigorous utterance, the same appreciation of the worth of what they have to do. With each of them there is the same wide vision, the same instinct of catholicity. With each of them there is the same clear insight into what would never have been revealed to common eyes. As we carry our comparison more into matters of detail, we shall find that the likeness between them becomes greater rather than less.

CHAPTER V

THE USE OF ASSYRIA

THREE are two dark backgrounds against which Isaiah writes. About the first of these there is nothing especially peculiar nor unique. It is the common story of national sin, of low standards, of popular corruption, of general demoralization in the state. A little earlier, it had been Hosea's burden in Israel. A little later, it was to be Jeremiah's burden — the same evil persisting under new conditions. It is the story which Juvenal and Persius tell of imperial Rome. It has been the wretched subject of many moralists and satirists in many lands.

There is a dreary monotony about lists of sins. Perhaps there is no better way of setting forth that wickedness is not only wicked, but that it is dull and stupid too. There is nothing new here, nothing original, nothing but the same dead level of brutality and degradation. Upon one form of vice

after another the prophet calls down woe, but all of them alike come from contented ignorance and brazen self-satisfaction. The miserable people have succeeded in destroying the very foundations of righteousness. Not only do they make sport of life, and blot out from it all that is high and holy, but they call things by false names, and even while they sin lay claim to virtue. They call evil good and good evil. They put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. As for God, they have banished Him from His own world. "The harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe and wine are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of His hands." At the very beginning of his book, Isaiah, as one who has the right to speak for God, calls heaven and earth to heed the Divine complaint. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly; they have forsaken

the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward.” Under whatever forms it might manifest itself — and its name was Legion, as in later days — this was the mother-sin, the source and breeding-place of all the rest. And so the prophet speaks to his countrymen a parable of condemnation. In half a dozen verses we find the tender love which trusts and gives; the hope which must always go with great opportunity; the stern justice which is compelled, in spite of itself, to seek its own; the righteous indignation which cannot be suppressed when there is bitter disappointment which ought never to have been. “Let me sing for my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a wine-press therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.” This is no story without a meaning. Isaiah calls on those who hear to speak. “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I

pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be burnt up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed, but there shall come up briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." Could there be the slightest doubt as to the application of the parable? But the prophet remembers how dull of mind and hard of heart his hearers are. He will take no risks with those who are slow to understand. This is a picture of themselves, of the blessings which God has showered upon them, of the results which their own indifference and negligence must surely bring. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

The sin of his people must, of course, have ex-

erted a powerful influence upon Isaiah's work. It was this which he had to combat and resist. But there is another factor which comes no less prominently forward in his book. It may happen on a summer afternoon that the sky is obscured by thunder-clouds which spread from point to point until they have filled the whole horizon. Then, back of them, partly concealed by them, but making the blackness even blacker than it was before, there shines a dull, uncanny light. It is of none of those colors which we are wont to see. It cannot be described. It cannot be explained. It can only terrify. We do not know what it means, but we know that it means something out of the common run, and something dangerous. It may be a violent wind which shall uproot trees and tear down houses. It may be hail which shall pelt, and batter, and bruise. But, whatever it is, it is grim and mysterious, the more alarming from our very uncertainty about it.

Something of this sort was the outlook from Jerusalem in Isaiah's day. The sin of the people hid the heavens. But beside the sin which many enjoyed and a few rebuked, there was a power which

sooner or later must be reckoned with. In Isaiah's earlier chapters there are several allusions to the Assyrians. At first, they were hardly more than a name, albeit a name to conjure with, like the ogres which faithless nurses use to frighten children, and depress their too abounding spirits. They were surrounded by that glamor which the remote and the unfamiliar always wears. They were too far away, too shadowy, to inspire more than a vague feeling of unrest. Then they came nearer. What they lost in mysteriousness they gained in the sheer terror that their aspect caused. They are no longer a strange people, hovering about the Northern horizon, objects almost as much of curiosity as of fear. They have emerged from their obscurity, and the part which they play in the field of international politics is no longer a hypothetical one. Their own records tell us something of their methods of making war. They speak of tempests of clubs, and deluges of arrows; of chariots with scythes, the wheels of which are clogged with blood; of baskets stuffed with the salted heads of those who have dared to array themselves against them. Isaiah describes the swiftness of their movements, the irresistible

force of their attack, and the hideous desolation which they bring. "They shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and distress, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof."

When the Assyrian speaks for himself, we have self-satisfaction carried to the superlative degree. "Are not my princes altogether kings?" He names one town after another which has been laid waste before him. All are alike in that baptism of blood and fire which he brings. "Is not Calno as Carrchemish? Is not Hamath as Arphad? Is not Samaria as Damascus?" The same destruction has included all. And as it has been, shall it not be still? Shall he who has always been victorious now fear defeat? The experience of the past brings confidence. "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" Not only are all enemies alike to this proud conqueror. The worship of idols is the only worship which he can understand. The gods of all nations he despises with the same scorn.

But this very confidence marks out the way for his destruction. He is too sure of himself and of his

power. In his own eyes he is strong, and wise, and prudent. As a boy robs a bird's nest, he has scattered every nation that came in his way, and there was no resistance. "There was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." But he has forgotten God, whose instrument he is. "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?" The prophet's indignation is kindled against the insolence of mere brute force. They who have been the blind messengers of God's punishment must bring upon themselves a heavier punishment than any they have inflicted. Like those whom they have chastised, they have had eyes which could not see, and ears which could not hear the voice of God. They go on their way in all their pomp of power. But there is One with whom they have not reckoned. Let them beware. At the very moment of triumph they will find their prey snatched from their expectant hands, they will find their proud imaginings fading to nothing. There is tremendous dramatic intensity in the prophet's description of their onward march. They come closer and closer. One place after another

falls before them. In the succession of names, strange and unfamiliar though they are to us, we seem to hear the very crash of things. It is the overture to some grim tragedy. It is the account, indeed, of a march which never took place, but it expresses the feelings which the real march caused. The opposing force has reached the border. "He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Mich-mash he hath laid up his carriages." He surmounts whatever might have hindered his advance. "They are gone over the passage; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled." Consternation and dismay come with them. "Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim; cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth." The country is made desolate before them. "Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee." And now the end has come. "As yet shall he remain at Nob that day; he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." But suddenly a new power comes upon the scene. "Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts!" His onward progress could not be traced from place to place, for He has

been always with the city. But the Assyrian has had his day, has boasted his last boast. The Lord "shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled."

This was Isaiah's forecast, comparatively early in his career, of what must certainly take place. The event justified his judgment. It was God Himself who had chosen the Assyrians for their work. Again and again Isaiah speaks of them as the instruments of a Divine vengeance upon those who had forgotten the Divine. We have seen the hold which luxury and vanity had gained upon Jerusalem. If reformation from within had become impossible, the Lord would bring upon them a reformation from without. The prophet uses a vigorous and striking figure. The king of Assyria should be, as it were, a razor, with which the Lord might shave the land. The people must eat the food of scarceness, and where there had been a thousand vines there should be thorns and briars. "I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge." Prosperity had spoiled Jerusalem. The Assyrians bring that time

of trial and distress which will open the way for better days. But they could not understand their position as God's messengers. "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." And so we come to the final catastrophe. For a long time Assyria had been but a menace in the distance. There were other triumphs which were more convenient. But now the Assyrian army stood at the very gates of Jerusalem. There was nothing lacking to mark the treachery and insolence of the foe. He took the tribute, stripped from the temple, which King Hezekiah offered, and then he came back again, with fresh threats and even more humiliating demands. The king of Assyria sends his messenger, the Rabshakeh, as he was called, to blow his master's trumpet and to put forth all the vulgar powers which might terrify. He stands without the wall and argues, and his argument is scarcely less savage than his attack. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" This is the question which his master, the great king, bids him ask. Is it in Egypt? But Egypt is no more to be relied on than Assyria. It is the cynical judgment of a knave upon another

knave whom he knows to be no better than himself. Is it in God? That is even more preposterous. What can God do for them? God cannot be bought nor sold nor played with. Then God is a wholly negligible quantity, a mere illusion. How about Hamath and Arphad and Sepharvaim? This is the argument with which the Assyrian meets any argument that may arise. There was no God found to keep these from falling into his hands. Why should Jerusalem expect to fare better? We have egotism triumphant, and conceit appearing as the supremest quality of success.

All this was in the ears of the people, and in a language that they could understand. But there was a message for the king as well. There is the same cold-blooded impudence, the same effrontery, the same assurance of easy victory. Hamath and Arphad walk across the scene, as is their unhappy wont, and are attended by a retinue of others who are in like case with themselves. Let not God deceive him. He shall be utterly destroyed.

Then Hezekiah goes into the temple for the second time. But this time it is not that he may strip it of its beauties with which to bribe his foe. He is in

sore distress, and the narrative tells us how he meets his trouble. The very simplicity of the record adds to its impressiveness. “Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.” The king at least had learned the lesson which the prophet had been always teaching, that temporizing and half-way measures were in vain, that there was but one source from which lasting help could come. He paid no heed to the taunts of his scornful foe. Hamath and Arphad and their fate brought him no dismay. He prayed for deliverance. He looked to heaven for that safety which seemed so far away from earth. It was the moment of extremest danger, and in that moment we have the confession of Isaiah’s faith. “Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria; he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.” It was even as the prophet had said. In a

moment there came that mysterious destruction of which we read in Isaiah and in the Second Book of Kings. There was no attack, no force of arms, no human interposition. Was it the breath of pestilence, or what? The record only tells us that the angel of the Lord went forth, and carried death. An hour ago there was wild disorder and despair within the city. Now there is calm. "Where is he that counted? Where is he that weighed the tribute? Where is he that counted the towers before he made ready to pull them down?" They have all vanished. That deep speech will be heard no more in threats against the city, that stammering tongue which they could not understand is still. Instead of chaos and commotion there is peace. There is a psalm which evidently refers to this event. We see the discomfiture of those who had come up against the holy city. Fear and sorrow have come upon them, as upon a woman in her travail. They are broken like ships of the sea before the east wind. But God's city is eternally secure. There is no part of her that is not sacred, that is not beloved. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses, that ye may

tell them that come after. For this God is our God for ever and ever; He shall be our guide unto death."

In Isaiah's view, then, the use of Assyria was this. It was an instrument which God employed to punish a disobedient and gainsaying people. It was an instrument, for it must be wielded; it could not wield itself. The hand which smote with it might withhold it also; and if in the smiting there was revealed the Divine anger, in the withholding there was revealed the Divine power and the Divine love. To the Jews who beheld the fury of the Assyrian attack it might well have seemed as if it were overwhelming and irresistible; but its force only bore witness to the greater might of Him who could bring it to an end. To the nations of that day there must have been many times when Assyria appeared as an insolent and blatant bully, to be feared and hated. It was not hard for Isaiah to sympathize with this conception. Even for him, especially in his earlier days, it was a half-truth; but as the years went by he came to see that it was that half of the truth which was the least worth knowing. Whatever Assyria might be in itself, — and it was everything that was

terrible and brutal, — its value to the prophet lay in the fact that, in spite of itself, it was compelled to show forth God's power. In the Assyrian armies, their impetuous advance and their sudden check, Isaiah saw a living illustration of the great truth that wind and storm do but fulfil God's word. They sought to inspire terror in themselves, and their fiercest attack issued in the profoundest peace. It was through Assyria that Jerusalem came to understand herself and God.

When now we pass from Isaiah to Browning, from the eighth century before Christ to the nineteenth century of the Christian era, we find ourselves of course in an entirely new atmosphere. Assyria in our own day would be an impossible anachronism. Moreover, the poet, unlike the prophet, is no reformer. He is concerned with the principles of righteousness, but the details of unrighteousness, whether individual or national, are beyond his province. He has none of that feeling of personal responsibility for the people's sin which pressed so heavily upon Isaiah. But while the gods like winged bulls have long since had their day, and while that uncouth speech which once struck terror to men's

hearts is represented for us only by a few inscriptions which antiquarians painfully decipher, the ancient prophet and the modern poet are concerned with the same truth. Say what we will, there is a tyranny of life which cannot be denied. There is a pressure of material things upon us from which there is no escape. The Assyrian in his modern form is no less conspicuous, though he may be less picturesque, than in the days when Isaiah and Hezekiah knew him. He makes the same proud boastings, and we know that they are not empty threats. He can point to the experience of the past in proof of his power. Calno is as Carchemish. Samaria is as Damascus. Why should Jerusalem escape? The noise of his approach is heard in the distance. He comes nearer and nearer. One outpost after another has fallen before him. Aiath and Migron, Ramah and Madmenah, are at his mercy. In a moment, he will be thundering at the city gates. Is there need to translate him into the language of modern life? He stands for all those forces which distress, and frighten, and hold our manhood in contempt. He is the personification of insolent and brutal strength, without intelligence, without compassion, without mercy,

without love. He is in the world to conquer and destroy. He is death, with all that there is about it of grimness and horror. He snatches men from their homes, and carries them into desolate regions where all things are strange. He is decay, the failing of the powers of life, the evil days when the doors shall be shut in the streets, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, when the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken. He is sickness — the trembling heart, and failing eyes, and sorrow of mind, when there is fear day and night, and man has no assurance of his life. He is disappointment in its thousand forms. How many a man begins to build, and is not able to finish. How many a man plants, and another reaps the harvest. How many a gallant undertaking ends in failure. And all these things, the power of materialism in every aspect and from every point of view, the world without the spirit, the army of adversaries that beleaguer the body and besiege the soul, the Assyrian seems to stand for. It is idle to deny their power. It is real. Men must die. Men must grow old. Men must be laid aside from work in the midst of their years, with plans half carried out. Failure of some sort lies in wait

for all of us, except indeed for those unfortunates who aspire to nothing, and so are at the lowest possible level all the time. The world presses, and lays its heavy burden on our backs. Calno is as Carchemish. Hamath is as Arphad. Samaria is as Damascus. So it has been. So it will ever be.

No optimism can deny this. No cheerfulness of disposition can overlook it. No faith can dismiss it as a phantom. Browning recognizes it in a hundred ways. But for poet, as for prophet, the last word on the subject has not yet been said. There is another power in the world with which the forces of disintegration and decay must measure strength, and, however strong they are, the other power is found stronger still. Rabbi Ben Ezra looks without misgiving on the coming of old age. Its very infirmities reveal something of God which could not be revealed before. The fierceness of life's battle bears witness to the supreme importance of the result. Dull circumstance may interfere with accomplishment, but it cannot interfere with aspiration, and it is aspiration by which life is measured, after all.

“Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go.
Be our joys three parts pain.
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe.”

It is the striving that brings out man’s strength. It is the pang which proves his power of endurance. It is the daring which tests his courage.

In one of Browning’s short poems, “Instans Tyrannus,” we have what might almost be a commentary on the chapters of Isaiah which describe the Assyrian arrogance and the Assyrian overthrow. It is the monologue of a tyrant who has selected one of his subjects for his especial hatred. There was no reason for this fierce dislike; a fact which made it all the fiercer. There is no hatred so malignant as that which springs of itself from the slime and ooze of some corrupt and bitter nature. The tyrant taxed his ingenuity to the utmost that he might plague and vex his victim. He crushed him to earth with sheer dead weight of persecution. He tempted him with most consummate treachery.

“I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.”

And then, at the last, he takes the true Assyrian attitude. Has he not always had his way? Shall he not have it still? Shall this man find safety in his insignificance, when the king himself condescends to hate? The moment of his malicious triumph is at hand.

“I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break,
Ran my fires for his sake;
Overhead, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine;
Till I looked from my labor content
To enjoy the event.”

So far as the tyrant could see, nothing was wanting to the accomplishment of his design. He had only to wait, and watch his victim’s fruitless struggle, and prolong the agony as much as possible. “He shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion.” He settled himself in glad anticipation. So far as he could see, all was in readiness. But the hitch came in his plan because he could not see the whole horizon. The eyes of tyranny, of brute force which becomes brutality, are not very sharp. For

all his strength the Assyrian had no insight into spiritual things. Whatever was not like himself, he dismissed with the same contemptuous indifference. In his vocabulary, all gods were alike. He did not permit them to interfere with his designs. So with this tyrant. He had made his plans. Now he would carry them out. What could prevent? Is not Hamath as Arphad? But let us hear his own account of the conclusion. Were they two, oppressor and oppressed, to be the only actors in the scene?

“When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say, without friend?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun’s self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest.
Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God’s skirts, and prayed.
—So, *I* was afraid.”

The tyrant’s power revealed God’s greater power. He who was threatened with destruction found safety and peace in the very extremity of his plight.

The same idea is developed in a somewhat different way in one of the scenes in "Pippa Passes." We are shown a gang of silly students whose uncouth spite vents itself against their comrade Jules. He has been heard to call them dissolute, brutalized, heartless bunglers,— and the remark was libellous because it was so true. With fiendish ingenuity, they contrive to entrap him into a marriage with a beautiful fool. To wreck his life is a small punishment for his low opinion of themselves. But he will not let his life be wrecked. He takes the evil that they have done him, and makes it over into good. They have deceived him. There is no denying that. He must give up the ideals which he had set before himself. The old life which he had planned has become impossible. He cannot make sculpture his first object, as he had intended. Then he will undertake the shaping of a soul.

"Here is a woman with utter need of me.
This body had no soul before, but slept
Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free
From taint or foul with stain, as outward things
Fastened their image on its passiveness;
Now it will wake, feel, live,— or die again.

Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
Be Art—and further, to evoke a soul
From form be nothing? This new soul is mine."

He has been tied to this woman for his own undoing. He turns it into the occasion of her making.

There are a number of poems of various kinds, ranging in character from "Abt Vogler" to "Fifine at the Fair," in which Browning speaks in an incidental way of the manner in which evil may be forced to do the work of good in its own despite. The very incidental quality, as of something which may be taken for granted without argument or explanation, shows how deeply the idea was rooted in the poet's mind. No doubt the most conspicuous and striking illustration of it is found in Browning's great masterpiece. "The Ring and the Book" is the story of a sordid and brutal murder. The poet brings before us a little world, the world of Rome two hundred years ago, and we see its people living their lives before our eyes. Guido Franceschini has killed his wife Pompilia, and as if to insure good measure and settle all old grudges at a single reckoning, he has included her old foster-parents in the

slaughter. Had she not fled from him, and fled with a priest? And had they not deceived him about her at the first, by making him think that she would be worth money to her husband, and were they not now giving her aid and succor in her flight? The people are greatly excited over this deed that has been committed in their midst. It is the talk of the street and of the town. Wherever one goes, one may hear judgments upon it — judgments, as is their wont, which reveal much more accurately those who pronounce them than those on whom they are pronounced. But little by little, out of the mass of half-information and exaggeration, of contradiction and distortion, of prejudice and sympathy and prudishness and pity, we come to see the truth. Pompilia was married to this man at twelve years old. She married him because her mother bade her, as she would have run an errand, or swallowed a dose of bitter medicine. Guido was old, ugly, wicked; but he was of the aristocracy, and the peasant-mother's eyes were dazzled by the glare. As for his motives, we may let the Pope speak, in that searching analysis which he brought to the final consideration of the case.

“Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
To the true longing of the heart that loves,
No trace of these; but all to instigate,
Is what sinks man past level of the brute,
Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
All is the lust for money; to get gold,—
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder. Make
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within
The clutch of hate by love, the trap’s pretence.
What good else get from bodies and from souls?
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
—What, where, or how, appreciate those who tell
How the toad lives; it lives,— enough for me.”

This was the life to which Pompilia was condemned. She had had scarcely a thought beyond her dolls. Now she is taken from her friends, insulted, scorned, humiliated, degraded. She bore it for four years, but with the approach of motherhood she could not bear it longer. She would not bring a new life into that vile place. She sought for means to escape, and found a friend in Giuseppe Caponsacchi, a young priest to whom Guido himself had sent forged letters in the hope that he might entrap Pompilia into unfaithfulness. But Guido did ill to

judge other men by himself. Caponsacchi was moved, not by Pompilia's beauty, but by her woes. He rescued her from her jailers at Arezzo, and she came at last in safety to her parents' house at Rome. Though Guido followed them, and overtook them, and brought against them his false charges with every air of righteous indignation and injured innocence, he could not again obtain possession of his victim. He bided his time. After a little, when she had been lulled into security by an interval of peace, he came to her father's house at night with hired murderers, and all who were there were stabbed to death. Pietro and Violante died at once. Pompilia, with twenty-two wounds upon her, lived four days. But it was long enough for her to tell her story.

Truly, it was the atmosphere of old Assyria that she had breathed, with something of Egypt's subtilty and guile included. All about her were hate, colossal selfishness, the power of brute force, "fox-faced this, cat-clawed the other," with Guido, whose kindness was worse than his dislike. The story begins in blackness, and ends in blood. But out of it, what issues? For all the long dark hours, for all the dim twilight when men strained their eyes, and could not

tell what they saw, the sunlight of God's presence breaks at last upon the world. Caponsacchi stands before the judges, and tells them what were some of his former theories of life. He had hesitated a little before he became a priest. The vows were too hard for him to bear. Then came a superior and explained them to him.

“Guiseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
Nobody wants you in these latter days
To prop the Church by breaking your backbone,—
As the necessary way was once, we know,
When Diocletian flourished, and his like.”

Now, something else is required, something which is regulated according to the ability of each.

“I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
Close under lock and key, kept at his task
Of letting Fenelon know the fool he is,
In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
But you, who are so quite another paste
Of a man,— do you obey me? Cultivate
Assiduous, that superior gift you have
Of making madrigals.”

On these terms, he was ordained. He did as he was told, and lived according to the easy prescription that was given him. He was such a man, getting the best of both worlds in charming fashion, when he was brought into contact with Pompilia and the depths of life.

Pompilia's experience was of a different sort, first of mere innocence, and then of black, sodden, unrelieved misery. She seems, first, a child, and then, a sufferer. But when the worst has come to pass, and she lies there, knowing that she has but a few short hours to live, she gains a view of life that would have been quite impossible at any earlier moment. Is this the girl who used to have no thought beyond a ribbon for her hair? Is this the pitiful victim of Guido's cruel hate? Who is this man of whom she speaks? Can it be the ecclesiastical darling of the world that is discreetly gay, the authority on the proper manner of mounting fans? She tells of all that happened, in order, although her thoughts are always on the child whom she may never know. Her life with Guido was a hideous dream, all over now.

“It is the good of dreams, so soon they go.”

She tells of Caponsacchi and his coming.

“All day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.”

And then, at the end, she turns away from those who are about her bed, and calls upon Caponsacchi as if they two were alone in the whole world. This is no weak woman speaking to her lover. This is no victim going sadly to her death. This is no erring wife who has sinned, and knows her fault. But, from the vantage-ground of one who has but an hour more to live, with the perspective which her situation gives her, she says what is most worth the saying. It was Caponsacchi who came to her help, to his own hindrance. She is child no longer. She knows what men have said and will say. But her words now are not for them, but for Caponsacchi and for God.

“O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death.
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I’ the coming course, the new path I must tread,
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that.”

But let none of those about her misunderstand her meaning. She knows that he has vows. She would not call him from them. Marriage has been to her a word of evil omen. It has meant cruelty, not love.

“He is a priest;
He cannot marry therefore, which is right;
I think he would not marry if he could.
Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable;
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'T is there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage, but are as the angels; right,
Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that. Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much,— birth, power, repute so much
Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these.
Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage; they are man and wife at once
When the true time is; here we have to wait
Not so long neither. Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime, hold hard by truth and his great soul,

Do out the duty. Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise."

Guido and his crew have disappeared. There is no thought more of the gaping wounds. Evil has overreached itself, and has turned the pleasure-loving priest into a strong man of God, has made a Madonna of the tortured girl. It was as when the Assyrian hosts came up about Jerusalem, and did their worst, and Isaiah simply refused to take account of them at all. They were only for the moment. There were other things which were more worth thought. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down." The turmoil and confusion through which they were passing only made its peace and permanence more sure.

CHAPTER VI

THE REMNANT SHALL RETURN

THE conditions of Isaiah's life were such that evil was always very prominently before his eyes. As God's servant and God's spokesman, he was compelled to hate what God hated and to condemn what God condemned. He was a prophet of doom, whose business it was to point out the close and inevitable connection between punishment and sin. And so we have his many words of denunciation, his biting sarcasm, his eager pleading, his stern rebuke. We have seen how he discerned the working of God's hand while the history of his time was in the making, and how he perceived in the ruthless power of Assyria only a manifestation, half concealed and half revealed, of the greater power of God. With a mighty voice, he declared that sin meant penalty. After the manner of his time and class, he gave to one of his sons a symbolical name which should bear constant witness

to this stern truth. The boy was called Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and the uncouth syllables reminded all who spoke his name that there were those who were hastening to the prey, that they might divide among themselves the spoil of nations which were in rebellion against God.

But just as Maher-shalal-hash-baz was not Isaiah's only child, neither was the gloomy doctrine which his name expressed Isaiah's only thought. Though men were evil, God remained good. Though men might turn away from Him, He would receive them when they came back again. Though the holy city was full of every kind of abomination and iniquity, it was still the city of the Heavenly King, and therefore there was that in it which could not be destroyed. The prophet's other son bore witness to this gentler and more inspiring truth. He was called Shear-jashub, The Remnant shall Return; and while his brother's rugged name spoke plainly enough of man's weakness and the distress that must follow sin, he testified that man has in himself the power of recovery, and that to God's long-suffering and loving-kindness there is no end.

These two truths, opposite but not opposing, the

prophet develops side by side. We must remember, indeed, that it is the nation which is the unit of his thought. He is an ambassador whose concern is with the state, not a policeman who must reduce a boisterous individual to order. He speaks in public, not in private, terms; and his subject is not personal salvation, but civic righteousness. With all the forces of disintegration that are at work, there is something which will check decay, and scatter the darkness which threatens to overwhelm the land. "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." But this remnant is indestructible. Just as the Lord's hand is mighty against those who turn away from Him, so is it mighty also to save the Remnant which shall return.

There is not a section of Isaiah's book in which there is not at least a suggestion of this comforting thought. It is the prophet's constant lament that the remnant will be very small, "two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof"; but its significance is out of all proportion to its size. It marks

the difference between destruction and continuance, between blank nothingness and the service of the Lord. A single passage sets forth the far-reaching consequences of such a doctrine, and shows us the prophet's thought in all the fulness of its beauty. "It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea." However widely His people may be scattered, they are not beyond His reach. Whatever the conditions of their exile, they cannot lose the promise of return. Moreover, as when Zechariah prophesied, the restoration of Israel carries with it an assurance of blessing for all the nations of the world. The outcasts of Israel shall be assembled, and the dispersed of Judah shall be gathered together from the four corners of the earth, but in all this there is an ensign for the nations, a rallying place where they too may come for comfort, and hope, and security, and peace. The evil of the former time shall come to an end. It has worked out its own destruction, and must die a

natural death. "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." The very face of Nature shall be changed, with the passing away of that which was fit only for destruction, and with the survival of that which did not require the violence of chastisement and rebuke. Where there was defeat, there shall be victory. Where there was flight, there shall be conquest. Where there used to be obstacles to progress, they may go without interruption and without hindrance. The prophet measures the triumphant future by the innocent past. "There shall be an highway for the remnant of His people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt."

With the view of the sacredness of Jerusalem which prevailed in Isaiah's day and in the troublous times which followed, it is not surprising that he should be convinced that the city, however heavily she must be visited for her sins, was yet too holy to be destroyed. The Psalter is filled with this assurance. Many of the psalms, of course, are the expression of personal experience and personal need,

but, whenever Jerusalem is spoken of at all, it is as the very resting-place of God. "The hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth; upon the north side lieth the city of the great king; God is well known in her palaces as a sure refuge." Because God is in the midst of her, she cannot be removed. It is out of Sion that God appears in perfect beauty. It is in Sion that He is praised, it is Sion where He dwells. It is the hill of Sion which He loves. "Very excellent things are spoken of thee, thou city of God." At a later period, this devotion has increased rather than diminished. "They that put their trust in the Lord shall be even as the mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast forever."

But Isaiah's doctrine of the Remnant, while no doubt it is with Jerusalem that it has its chief concern, undergoes a development which we should hardly have expected. He has said many bitter things against Assyria and against Egypt. The meadows by the Nile shall become dry, and be no more. There is a spirit of perverseness in the land, and Egypt has gone astray in every work, as a drunken man staggers in the way. There is a double

sarcasm in the prophet's word, directed equally against those who put their trust where help cannot be found, and those who imagine that they are strong when they are weak, when he declares that the Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses flesh, and not spirit, and that when the Lord shall stretch out His hand both he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is holpen shall fall, and they all shall fail together. The Assyrian is in no better case. He shall be broken in pieces, and every stroke of the staff of doom, which the Lord shall lay upon him, shall be with tabrets and harps. He shall flee from the sword, and his princes shall become tributary. His rock shall pass away by reason of terror, and the princes who have boasted so blatantly shall be dismayed. This is the attitude of Isaiah to which we are accustomed towards these public enemies. But there is an amazing exception to these threats of doom. "In that day"—the day of redemption and deliverance which shall come—"in that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third

with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." The roads that were once so closely guarded are open to all who care to come and go. The one-time enemies are united in a common service. The nations which had brought the Divine displeasure upon themselves now know the tenderness of the Divine love. In the last analysis, it is not because of God's care for the Holy City, but because there is something in the very nature of man which is akin to God Himself, which makes it inevitable that in every nation, however far it may have wandered from the way, there is a Remnant which, some time, somehow, must return to God.

Between the prophet and the poet there is this great difference, that the one is concerned with people in the mass, the other with the separate men and women of his poems. In passing from Isaiah to Browning, or from any man who deals with the affairs of state to another man who deals with matters of the soul, the whole subject must be put on a new plane. But, aside from this, we find in the modern

English poet all that the ancient Hebrew prophet has set forth. He comes to it under many figures, and from many points of view. Just as Isaiah's vision of restoration included not only Israel, to which he belonged, but Egypt and Assyria, which were alien even when they were not hostile, so Browning's corresponding thought has the very widest range. Perhaps there is no subject which better illustrates that universality of his which we have already noticed. In the most forlorn specimen he can find something which belies the forlornness, and which gives at least a suggestion of better things. It is not only of the redemption from actual sin of which he speaks. In the midst of vulgarity there is something which makes for refinement, in superstition and incredulity, the believing too much and the believing too little, faith and reason are not utterly destroyed. This is no small part of the thesis of "Christmas Eve." Driven by stress of weather, the poet takes refuge in a wretched little chapel in the middle of a yet more wretched common, to which there comes a congregation most wretched of all. It is the very apotheosis of everything that would offend good taste.

“In came the flock; the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper,
(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough)—
Round to the door, and in— the gruff
Hinge’s invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.”

She was followed by a “many-tattered little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother,” with a dirty-faced baby to take care of. Then there came a female something in dirty satins, “all that was left of a woman once.” There was a man with a wen; none of whose misery is left to the imagination. But the congregation was nothing to the sermon, and the manner in which the sermon was received.

“The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbor’s coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child’s hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man’s immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience’s avidity.

No sooner got our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence.
As to hug the book of books to pieces;
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt
yours—

So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up in a sense, no doubt;
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbors
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labors
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or (who can tell?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon;
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor."

It was too much. The poet's gorge rose at the adoration of the absurd, the muddling of truth with contented ignorance.

“I flung out of the little chapel.”

As he went, there came to him thoughts and visions. He had seen God's power in the immensity of the heavens, but he had felt God's love in his heart, the mightier of the two.

“The loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.”

As he thought thus of God's love, suddenly —

“All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air.
On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of Him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face; only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise;
My mind filled with the cataract
At one bound of the mighty fact.
I remember, He did say,
Doubtless, that to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,

He would be in the midst, their friend;
Certainly He was there with them!"

"He despairs not His own thirst to slake
At the poorest love was ever offered."

Though He had left the chapel, it was not, like the poet, through disgust at the burlesque uncouthness of the worship that was rendered there. Rather, it was because there were other regions which He must visit, other places which He must bless. While the poet still clings to the hem of the Divine garment, they come to Rome, and stand before St. Peter's at some high festival.

"Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies;
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder."

But presently, there is something more than this calm tolerance; there is fellowship.

"Do these men praise Him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error, but above
The scope of error, see the love."

And at the last, there is a point of view which can arouse enthusiasm even over an asceticism which might well enough have seemed useless, or worse. There are those who have turned their backs upon much of the glory, the beauty, the wonder, the majesty, of the world. They need not to have done so. They ought not to have done so. Do not say that until you know why they have given up what is so good. It was not through indifference or contempt, but

“All these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present.”

There can be no blame for such an act as that, but the reverse.

“Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference.”

It is the same, again, when they come to the German professor, “three parts sublime to one grotesque.” He has robbed Christianity of all that makes it what it is, but he sees the Divine beauty even while he speaks of the myth of Christ. The

vision does not turn away, and the poet would conclude with a panegyric upon tolerance —

“A value for religion’s self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbor’s faith with fretfulness,
Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism — ”

But there is something wholly inadequate in such a termination, and taken by itself it would be little more than a misleading parody. The lazy glow of benevolence towards the beliefs of another cannot take the place of one’s own belief. Though Browning has but little to say of Christ — he speaks of men, not of God — He is yet for him the Light of every man that cometh into the world. This is the meaning of that catholicity of interest, that insistence upon the worth of the most worthless man, from which there is no escaping in his work. But for the very reason that He is the light of every man, we cannot see by another’s light. We must have our own. The soul which built for itself the palace of art held no form of creed, but contemplated all. Its tolerance, founded upon a narrow satisfaction with itself

rather than upon any breadth of sympathy with others, contributed to its undoing. Men were put into the world to act, not to look on. Tolerance is no doubt a part, — only a part — of man's duty towards his neighbor; but his duty towards God remains. And so the poem is not yet ended.

“Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship; let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share!
This constitutes my earthly care;
God's is above it and distinct.
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared; but should my best endeavor
To share it, fail — subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me — no more can I —
It is but for myself I know.”

And the last word of all is a reminder that practice is better than precept. The vision was a dream. The

little chapel where the poet was betrayed into untimely sleep has lost none of its meanness and uncouthness. The preacher speaks through his nose. His gesture is too emphatic. Unlike St. Paul, but like too many of his kind, alas! he fights as one that beateth the air. Beside what's pedagogic, his subject-matter itself lacks logic. His English is ungrammatic. In pastor and people, there is everything that is offensive and absurd. But muddy water is better than none at all, and treasure held in earthen vessels is treasure still. The poet has learned his lesson. He must be himself, but he can adapt himself to conditions as he finds them. Because things are not at all as he would choose to have them, he may not dismiss them with sweeping condemnation, there is no excuse for him to stand aloof. Nor does he.

“May truth shine out, stand ever before us!
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hephzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield’s Collection,
To conclude with the Doxology.”

It may be felt that in a poem like this, although it shows us “remnants” of one sort and another,

rescued from catastrophes of vulgarity, of wholesale credulousness and general disbelief, the subject is treated very largely from an academic point of view. Allowing for all the difference that there must be between a question of national existence and a question of individual salvation, this truth at the root of error, this soul of goodness in things evil, is not quite the remnant which Isaiah describes as turning back to God out of its wrong-doing and its sin. But as the doctrine develops under Browning's hand, we shall see that he covers all of Isaiah's ground, although his mountain summit is reached by a much more gradual ascent, and therefore requires a much larger surface. In his own sphere, what Isaiah teaches as positive truth and with the authority of the prophetic order, Browning teaches too; and he teaches it with an assurance which is far stronger than any pious hope. Meanwhile, there are a hundred suggestions of the thought, and approximations to it, many of them, after Browning's manner, brought in as mere parentheses and asides to something else. There are these verses from "*Cristina*," in which he speaks of the depths that may be found in the soul of any man, and the clearness of vision which may come when it is least expected.

“Oh we’re sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure though seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit’s true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

“There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse
Which for once had play unstifled
Seems the sole work of a life time,
That away the rest have trifled.”

There is the forlorn hope of which “The Last Ride Together” speaks. The barest chance that all may not be lost is enough to set the pulses tingling. It is a story of hopeless love.

“All, my life seemed meant for, fails.”

There is nothing to look forward to but separation and vain regret. But may there not be one last ride before the parting comes? So, at any rate, one day more is snatched from the dull round of

misery which looms ahead. And who can tell what may happen?

“Who knows but the world may end to-night?”

Sometimes we come upon Browning's thought of the remnant, gained of course by a very different road from that along which Isaiah travels, as he points out for us how closely good and bad are intermingled in this world. For him, there can be none of that easy separation between sheep and goats which has been the pride of prigs and the restless desire of semi-theologians.

“Best people are not angels quite;
While not the worst of people's doings scare
The devil.”

In his description of Pietro and Violante, he gives a commentary upon what we may accept as the average of mankind.

“Foul and fair,
Sadly-mixed natures; self-indulgent, yet
Self-sacrificing too; how the love soars,
How the craft, avarice, vanity, and spite
Sink again! So they keep the middle course,
Slide into silly crime at unaware,
Slip back into the stupid virtue, stay
Nowhere enough for being classed.”

Uncomplimentary as this account is, stupid and commonplace and unintentional as their virtue may be, still there is virtue there. And there is virtue to be found in every man and woman of whom Browning writes; nay, there is more than virtue, unless we think of virtue as something which cannot be overborne, which is certain of ultimate victory, however long and hard may be the struggle. In "Fifine at the Fair," a weak man speaks strong words.

"Partake my confidence! No creature's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth; fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone."

And so, in Browning's characters, there is always this possibility of something better, which comes when we do not look for it, but which cannot be lost sight of nor denied. He paints the common interests of life in reds and blues, but he is by no means chary of laying on the black. In the production of villains, there are very few poets who are his equal. But, in the very "absolutest drench of dark," we are made to feel that the last word has

not been said. Léonce de Miranda, the hero of "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," was weak and self-centred all his life; the word hero can be applied to such a man only in the strictest literary sense; but, at the moment of his death, he revealed a strength of which there had been no glimpse before. Mr. Sludge the Medium was a knave, a coward, and a fool, turning men's tenderest feelings into merchandise, and caring for nothing except the cash which he calls "God's sole solid in this world." He was caught out in his deception, and confessed because there was nothing else for him to do. He stands a self-admitted fraud. But he cannot end his story so.

"You 've heard what I confess; I don't unsay
A single word; I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor match,
And all the rest; believe that; believe this,
By the same token, though it seems to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I've thrown down; I can't help that,
It's truth! I somehow vomit truth to-day.
This trade of mine — I don't know, can't be sure,
But there was something in it, tricks and all!"

It is not an apology which could rehabilitate a scoundrel as an honest man; but as he goes on with a long discussion of those presentiments and premonitions which may mean so little or so much, we are made to realize that he is trying to excuse himself to himself, and that the man who has deliberately chosen lying as a profession yet has reverence for truth.

Of Browning's villains, no doubt Guido Franceschini is the chief. He is in the class with Iago or with the Shakespeare version of King Richard III., except that their crimes were on a larger scale than his, and therefore seem a little more worth while. We have seen something of his prostitution of every noble quality that man could possess, of the hideous travesty upon his kind that he presents with his hypocrisy, his cringing cowardice, his brutal bullying force. But when the Pope comes to weigh the case, while there is nothing that he can say for Guido, there is yet this hope of a Divine spark which may be lurking somewhere, and which, somehow or other, may be brought to light. Mercy would be a mockery, a mistaken kindness that could only plunge the wretch into deeper damnation. The

only leniency that man could show was to insist upon immediate and condign punishment. But after man has spared not, it may be that God can help, that Guido will be saved in his own despite. Even while the Pope signs the order for execution, with the old prophetic flinging of himself on God he looks for that remnant of the soul which may not be cut off from God forever.

“I have no hope

Except in such a suddenness of fate.

I stood at Naples once, a night so dark

I could have scarce conjectured there was earth

Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all;

But the night’s black was burst through by a blaze—

Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,

Through her whole length of mountain visible;

There lay the city thick and plain with spires

And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.

So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,

And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.

Else I avert my face, nor follow him

Into that sad obscure sequestered state

Where God unmakes but to remake the soul

He else made first in vain; which must not be!”

The necessity is made to lie in the heart of God rather than in the will of man.

There are many other illustrations which might be given, bearing more or less closely upon this theme, but enough has been said to show that poet and prophet, so far as this subject is concerned, move largely along parallel lines of thought. Browning sums up the whole matter when he speaks in his own person of the threatened destruction of the Paris Morgue. He tells us how he entered the little building which, perched where the waters of the Seine divide to form the island, seems almost to be waiting for its prey. There, enthroned each on his copper couch, lay the three men who, yesterday, of all the men in Paris, had most abhorred their lives, and so had killed themselves.

“Poor men, God made, and all for that!
The reverence struck me; o'er each head
Religiously was hung its hat,
Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,
Sacred from touch; each had his berth,
His bounds, his proper place of rest,
Who last night tenanted on earth
Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast,—
Unless the plain asphalte seemed best.”

They had met violent death; no doubt they had lived violent and ungoverned lives. This one, per-

haps, had coveted what was far beyond his reach, and could stand no longer the thought of his own inconsequence and helplessness. This one had hated his kind so bitterly that the hatred came at last to include himself. This one had let his lower nature take the reins, and could not bear it when he came to grief. There was a moral to it all, of course, but with the moral, which he who ran might read, there was a confidence which nothing could dispel.

“It’s wiser being good than bad;
It’s safer being meek than fierce.
It’s fitter being sane than mad.

My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after last, returns the first,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best, can’t end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.”

The remnant shall return. Neither Isaiah nor Browning were men who were disposed to regard evil lightly. The heresies and intellectual disorders of our own day, which turn evil into a cheap jest or a trifling hallucination, were not yet born;

but we may be sure that they would have had little sympathy either from poet or prophet. Their assurance came to them, not because they belittled evil, but because they made much of God. In the nation's darkest hour, Isaiah was certain that God's city could not perish, but must remain to be a blessing to all nations of the earth. When the wreck of the soul was threatened, Browning was certain that for man made in God's image there must be a power of recovery, even though it might be beyond the sight of human eyes.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEANING OF THE FUTURE

THE future is a court to which the most desperate case can always be appealed. So far as the past is concerned, there is no more to say. What I have written, I have written. There is neither room for hope, nor place for imagination. But in the future, everything is to be made. Its very formlessness gives it a fascination that is all its own. If there is need of remedy, it is in the future that the remedy may be sought and found. If present wrong-doing must bring punishment, it is in the future that the punishment will be inflicted. If there are rewards for bravery and zeal and patience, it is in the future that the distribution will be made. In every religion it has played a prominent part. The Mohammedan has his Paradise of sensuous delights, the North American Indian looked forward to his happy hunting-grounds, even the cultivated pagan may long for the "sleep eternal in an eternal night" which shall bring to an end the selfishness and ennui of his dull

existence. If life has taken away from him all other pleasures, it yet affords him a convenient opportunity for contemplating the joys of vacuousness, which can be tasted only in anticipation.

In Christianity, the importance of the future has been most strongly marked, so strongly marked, indeed, that there have been systems of theology in which very little room has been left for anything else. Heaven and hell have filled the canvas so completely, with hell predominating, as requiring more glaring colors, that men have lost sight of the fact that God so loved the world that He sent His Son into the world to take our nature upon Him, to wear the form of a servant, to be found in fashion as a man, and to teach men by His example, not how to behave in hell or heaven, but how to live on earth. There can be no adequate conception of Christianity which does not realize that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us on this earth of ours, that Jesus Christ was not ashamed to call men His brethren, not as they might be in some future state, but as they were, with all the hindrances and limitations of the world upon them; that He knows from His own experience, not indeed the

sin, but the temptations of our mortal nature which lead to sin in those less strong than He. Christianity, whatever it may have been Yesterday, or whatever of promise or of warning it may offer for To-morrow, speaks always its word of greatest power to To-day. It is a Life to lead, a Friend to welcome, a Guide to follow, a Master to accept.

But, when all this is clearly understood, it yet remains that Christianity has a firm grasp upon the future. Because it is concerned with life, it cannot be limited to three-score years and ten, or four-score years. Because it is concerned with character, its continuance cannot be dependent upon the changes and chances which belong to earth. Because it is concerned with love, it knows no end. We read of Christ Himself that for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame. He speaks to the disciples of the many mansions in His Father's house, and of the heavenly places which He must prepare for those who have been close to Him on earth. He has much to say of stewardship, and accounting, and responsibility. When, on the third day, He rises from the dead; when, a few weeks later, He goes with the disciples

as far as Bethany, and while He yet blesses them is parted from them, and returns again to the heaven from whence He came; He opens up before men's eyes such ~~vistas~~ as they could never have imagined. He shows them that life is too great a gift to end in death.

But this was seven hundred years and more after Isaiah's time. The Hebrew prophets could only gaze into the future in dim anticipation of one who should come some day to save his people, to solve their problems and to free them from their bonds. The wisest of them could have no such conception of personal immortality as is a commonplace in Christian days. In the story of Hezekiah's sickness, we may see how the men of that time felt regarding death. Not only did it mean the destruction of earthly hopes, but it was the blotting out of everything which made men what they were. It took from them all stoutness of heart, it opened up before them a yawning chasm into which they were compelled to plunge, it separated them irremediably from God Himself. "The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth." It is true

that we have the prophetic saying, foreshadowing the New Testament and repeated there, that God will swallow up death in victory, and that He will wipe away tears from off all faces; but as we read on we find that this is associated with taking away the rebuke of His people from the earth, and we realize that it is a promise to those who shall belong to the nation in the day of its redemption rather than to those who are now struggling with their sins while the nation turns its back on God. There is no subject in the treatment of which the prophet brings out more plainly that civic righteousness, not personal need, is always his chief concern.

For Isaiah, then, there could have been no such conception of the future as came, some centuries later, to St. Paul. Whatever his understanding of the Messiah may have been, the Messiah's work was to be done on earth, and did not extend to heaven. If Isaiah could have heard St. Paul's words about the Resurrection, they would have had no meaning for him. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." To the Corinthians of St. Paul's day,

this language was plain enough; but for Isaiah to have used it would have involved an entire reconstruction of his thought. He was a man of God, a man of the widest vision and the deepest faith. He looked for the Messiah, who should come to bring God's work to a successful issue. But that work was for the nation, and nations do not go to heaven. Isaiah's future contains no such pictures as those which the Book of Revelation sets before us. He sees things which shall be hereafter, but there is no door opened that he may look into heaven — that happens only when he first goes about his work; his heavenly vision is for the task before him, not for some life to come. For him the future is filled, not with songs of praise and thanksgiving to God in heaven, but with national triumph, with national redemption, with national vindication of God's sovereignty on earth.

The prophet looks to these coming years with no less assurance than St. Paul looks forward to the resurrection of the dead. God's place in them is just as inevitable as it is with St. Paul, when the end shall have come, and all things shall be in subjection under His feet. There is the same theatre, but

a new interpretation has been given to life. We have seen how the sins of his people lay heavily upon the prophet's heart and conscience, how loudly he repeated his threats of the punishment that must surely follow, how eagerly he insisted upon a remnant which should justify God's ancient choice of this people for His own. When the present has the very least to offer, Isaiah sees in the future God's opportunity and God's right. From the year when King Uzziah died, from the day when there came to him the dazzling vision of God's work and of God's need, God has been always at the centre of his thought. If the misdoings of his people have compelled him now and again to turn from God's splendor to man's weakness, it has been of hard necessity, and not of choice. But the future is an open page, unstained as yet. Though God must surely punish for man's sin, just as surely would He have man turn from his wickedness, and live. And so the future upon which Isaiah loves to dwell is not the day of reckoning, though that must have its place, but the day of recognition and return; the day when men shall know the purpose of their life, and the dignity of their calling, and the closeness of their fellowship with God.

From the beginning of Isaiah's prophesying to the end, this note is always sounding. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Here we have the fact of the present, and the possibility of the future, brought into sharpest contrast and set side by side. However dismal the state of affairs may be which prevails in Jerusalem, the time shall come when it shall be called The city of righteousness, The faithful city, and when it shall deserve the name. The nations shall come to it, that they may learn the ways of quietness and peace. It shall stand as a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain. This glorious future is so real to the prophet that, with something perhaps of the confusion of Hebrew tenses, but with even more of the tendency of human nature to make one's own what is eagerly desired, he can speak of it as if it had already come. The people that walked in darkness "have seen" a great light, though it has not yet shined upon them; but Isaiah projects himself into the future and looks back, and so describes what he is sure must happen as if it were already

come to pass. The spirit of peace extends even to the brute creation. The wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the young lion, forget their ancient enmity, and dwell together. On the one side there is no more ferocity, on the other side there is no more fear. The knowledge of the Lord will drive strife and discord and contention from the earth.

So full of promise is the future for those who can realize that it belongs to God, and who are content to leave it in His hands. It needs no new environment, for it fills the old environment with a new glory. "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." For ignorance there shall be knowledge, for darkness there shall be light. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth

the stroke of their wound." Even where punishment cannot be averted, there is a clear recognition by the prophet that it cannot be the final goal which God would reach. He has been speaking, with even more than his usual vehemence, of the certainty of the destruction that must come upon persistent sin. He holds up as it were a mirror before the people of Jerusalem, and bids them look to the crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, and there see their own selfishness and their own danger. The beauty of the valley shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit that dries and withers under the summer sun; but it is impossible that this was the purpose for which it was created. Close upon his words of threatening and rebuke, Isaiah speaks a parable. Why does the ploughman plough all day but that he may be able, in good time, to sow his seed? Why does he break the clods of earth upon his ground but that the seed may have a chance to germinate? He threshes the ripe grain, but he is not always threshing. The chaff must be separated from the wheat, but when that has been accomplished there is an end of such rough measures. And this is but a figure of the way in which God works. What-

ever may have happened in the past, God gives men the future that they may fill it with divine performance, and give it back to Him. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." It may be that these words come from a later time than that in which Isaiah lived, but at any rate they are filled with Isaiah's spirit. They show us what was his vision of the future, and give us his conception of its meaning.

The vision which came to Browning was very much of the same sort. Because he was a poet and not a prophet, because he was an Englishman and not a Hebrew, because, instead of looking forward to the Messiah, he could look back to Christ, there was of course a divergence from Isaiah in his understanding of the things for which the future stood. For him, it was not an opportunity for God's chosen people to enter into their inheritance upon the earth, but it was an opportunity for men and women to complete their development under new conditions, and with fuller light, whether in earth or heaven. With Browning, as with Isaiah, there is not much

thought of the future as a time when punishment must be inflicted for evil that has been done. This is an aspect of it which is not denied, but which is taken for granted and dismissed without further notice, as something which does not require argument nor explanation. For the unjust to recognize the hatefulness of his injustice, for the filthy to realize that he is wallowing in filth, there must be something more than the mere lapse of time. Though century were to be piled on century, and aeon upon aeon, it would not be enough to awaken the sinner to his sin, much less to convince him of his fault. There must be something else for that, and something which lies beyond man's power. As the Pope considers Guido's case, Guido's brother, the Abbot Paul, comes within his range of view. This is not the man upon whom he is called to sit in judgment. There are not many things to say about him, but it is not often that so much has been said in such short compass.

“This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate,— why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,

Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,
This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page— and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch!
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge;
Paul is past reach in this world and my time:
That is a case reserved."

There are many times when it seems as if the Pope, while he speaks for himself on the matter which is immediately before him, were speaking for Browning, too, on the whole subject which the special case suggests. Here, at any rate, he shows that there are questions regarding the future which lie beyond his province and the poet's; and he marks out the limitations within which we must expect the subject to be treated.

And indeed, with Browning, the future always stands for hope, and cheer, and promise. It gives him a free field for that invincible optimism of his,

which might come to grief if it were compelled to look too uninterruptedly at the shame and evil of this present world. The last calamity that could be associated with it would be that it should be forever fixed and changeless. In one of his latest poems, he tells the story of a native of the star Rephan, where all things are forever at their best. There was no want there; for whatever should be, they already have. There was no growth nor change, for where perfection is found made to order growth must be superfluous, and change could only mean deterioration. There was nothing worse nor better; in that uniform universe there could be no standards of comparison of any sort.

“Can your world’s phrase, your sense of things
Forth-figure the Star of my God? No springs,
No winters throughout its space. Time brings

“No hope, no fear; as to-day shall be
To-morrow; advance or retreat need we
At our stand-still through eternity?

“All happy: needs must we so have been,
Since who could be otherwise? All serene.
What dark was to banish, what light to screen?”

The man from Rephan, who has come to earth, looks into the faces of those to whom he tells his tale. They are worn and weak and furrowed, some with the weight of years, and some old before their time with care and worry. They are diseased in body, and sick in soul, and pinched by poverty, or satiated with wealth. But he has chosen to cast in his lot with theirs. That faultless exactness of Rephan has palled upon him. That endless repetition of perfection must kill all fellowship, and sympathy, and aspiration. Somehow — he thinks it could only be from God Himself — his soul's quietude awakened into discontent. There must be something more for him than this merging in a neutral best of weak and strong, and right and wrong, and wise and foolish. It is not sameness that he wants, but difference. His own smug perfectness is tawdry and second-rate. There must be an Infinite above and below him to attract his flight and to repel his falling.

“Enough: for you doubt, you hope, O men,
You fear, you agonize, die: what then?
Is an end to your life’s work out of ken?

“Have you no assurance that, earth at end,
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend?

“Why should ~~I~~ speak? You divine the test.
When the trouble grew in my pregnant breast,
A voice said, ‘So would’st thou strive, not rest?’

““Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,
Not rest content with a wealth that’s dearth?
Thou art past Rephan, thy place be earth!””

Rephan stood, not for attainment, for there can be no attainment where there has been no effort, nor for fulfilment, for there was nothing unfinished to fulfil, but for repletion, and the absence of opportunity, and the blotting out of any future. But it is the possibility of renewal, and recovery, and accomplishment, and triumph, that the future offers, which makes the silver lining to earth’s darkest cloud.

A future which is so full of significance must have room. It must reach on where men’s eyes cannot follow, and it must suggest what men’s imaginations cannot picture. Cleon, the pagan poet, recognizes this, even while he dismisses Paul and Christ with a

contemptuous sneer, as those whose doctrine could be held by no sane man. But the lust of living grows in him as he contemplates the certainty of death. The time has come when he must give things up, but even as he is forced to give them up he finds he wants them more than ever.

“Every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen:
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase.”

It is an anti-climax to which he cannot reconcile himself, that as he gains in knowledge he must lose the power of enjoyment, and that he, who is now a thinking, feeling, acting man, must be separated from the vigor and reality of life, and sleep in an urn. The thought is an intolerable one.

“It is so horrible,
I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
—To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us.”

His heathen philosophy affords no ground for his imagination, so, most reluctantly, he dismisses it as something which cannot be. But his very yearning for it shows how closely the thought of the future touches the soul of man.

What, to Cleon, could be no more than a shadowy and unsubstantial dream, takes shape with Paracelsus, in another age and under new conditions. To the German student, as to the Greek poet, there comes a passion for the richness and fulness of life which cannot be satisfied with renunciation. There was a time when Einsiedeln and its green hills were all the world to him. That time goes by, and he sets out upon his quest for knowledge. What was a speck expands into a star. Life is an adventure, a search, a progress. But at the beginning, Paracelsus can forecast the end.

“I go to prove my soul!

I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not; but unless God send His hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird. In His good time!”

This faith of his gives him patience, and strength, and courage. It carries him through failure, and the kind of failure which comes from within, and breaks the heart, as well as that which comes from without, and only tries the temper. It helps him to an understanding of the world, and to a recognition of his own insufficiency and incompleteness. It is man who is the consummation of God's scheme of being, the heir of hopes too fair to turn out false, and in whom, when he is known as man, there begins anew a tendency to God. And at the end Paracelsus, though he takes into full account all in which he has fallen short on earth, can still trust the future.

“If I stoop

Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendor, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom; I shall emerge one day.”

If he succeeds, there is so much still to do that the consciousness of success can never make him idle; and if he fails, the consciousness of failure is powerless to rob him of his hope.

It is just because the future means so much to

Browning that he so often carries it over into another world. This world, as it seemed to Cleon, is too small. And about that other world there is a solemnity and dignity that is all its own, apart from whatever terms on which one enters. A man has died on the field of honor, shot for a deed of dishonor that he has done. A moment ago, he was an offence to earth — but now :

“How he lies in his rights of a man!
Death has done all death can.
And, absorbed in the new life he leads,
He recks not, he heeds
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance; both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.”

The bearing of the penalty is the first step toward better things, and the new life may help to remedy the old. In a very different way, “Evelyn Hope” suggests the power of that new life in clearing up what this life was not able to reveal.

“Sixteen years old when she died!
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
Her life had many a hope and aim,

Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
And the sweet white brow is all of her."

But the man who had loved her, and never told his love, could not believe that all was over before it was begun. It might be that there was much to learn, much to forget, before his time should come, but that it must come some day he was certain. And he trusts the future, though the present is full of obscurity and doubt.

"So, hush — I will give you this leaf to keep;
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand."

The future is so full of possibility and power that it imparts to the present something of its own significance. What leads to so much must be itself worth while. The poet looks at the old pictures in Florence and wonders at their beauty. He compares the Greek statues which he sees about him with the men and women of his acquaintance. Not one of them has Theseus' kingliness, or Hector's grace, or Apollo's beauty, or Niobe's sublime despair.

The marble strength brings out the human weakness, the marble beauty emphasizes the meagre charms of flesh and blood. But there is this great difference, a difference beside which all other differences become as nothing.

“To-day’s brief passion limits their range;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect— how else? They shall never change:
We are faulty— why not? We have time in store.
The Artificer’s hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished:
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.”

So, as in Rephan, their very perfection becomes the sign of imperfection, and counts for so little just because it is so great. It must be always the blot upon perfectness that it can go no farther. But wherever there can be progress there is life. This is Abt Vogler’s assurance, which brings with it the added assurance that what is worth the keeping cannot be destroyed.

“There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;

What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;

On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

“All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that He heard it once; we shall hear it by and by.”

And so he plays upon his organ, and prolongs the pauses that there may be place for singing, and does not shun the discords that will make harmony more highly prized. Then the music ceases. It is earth with him, and the reign of silence resumes its sway. But what has been is presage of what must be, and he is content.

We have already glanced at the old Grammarian, who is one of Browning's most characteristic figures.

For the present moment he has the profound contempt, not of the prodigal who wastes it, but of the man who has a million such in store. Its worth lies not in what it is but in what it may become. The future is the only explanation of his life, but with that explanation —

“Was it not great? Did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen) —
God’s task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.”

In a way, it was the paradox of Christianity, though it was worked out along scholastic lines. He saved his life because he was so ready to lose it. The moment counted for so little because the whole scheme counted for so much.

But it is in “Easter Day” that Browning’s thought of the future gains its climax. And here, as with Isaiah, though it comes in vision in which this world and the next are mingled, the future of which the poet chiefly speaks is that which comes to-morrow,

rather than that which stretches away in some new life. He knows that there are earthly limitations in plenty. They are the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things as yet not seen, and so there is a dignity about them which helps to strip them of their harshness. That man should feel them is a sign that he may overcome them. But woe to those who accept the limitations as eternal, who take the part for the whole, the incomplete for the finished, the beginning for the end. They have their reward, but what a reward it is! This is what the poet sets forth in "Easter Day." Faith has been too hard. The invisible seemed too far away and shadowy to be much considered.

"This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own word,
To heaven and to infinity."

Then, in the vision of judgment, we have what follows. That will not be thrust upon him for which he has never cared. He will not find what he has not looked for.

"Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit."

But he shall have what he has desired, he shall gain what he has sought.

“Glut

Thy sense upon the world; 't is thine
Forever; take it!”

Is this judgment? Is the Divine bounty so free, so open-handed?

“How? Is mine,
The world? (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport.) Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight
For me?”

Yes, it was all true. There was no reservation or condition. Nothing should be withheld, except what he had voluntarily ignored.

“Take all the ancient show!
The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
And men apparently pursue
Their works, as they were wont to do,
While living in probation yet.
I promise not thou shalt forget
The past, now gone to its account;
But leave thee with the old amount

Of faculties, nor less nor more,
Unvisited, as heretofore,
By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
So, once more, take thy world! Expend
Eternity upon its shows,
Flung thee as freely as one rose
Out of a summer's opulence,
Over the Eden-barrier whence
Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

But to one who had so much in possession, what mattered exclusion from what he had not cared for, after all? He would do so much, he would range so far, he would fill himself so full of joy and of accomplishment. But while he yet unfolds his plans, while he is yet rejoicing over the richness that is to be his, the voice of judgment speaks another word.

"All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude;
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! Plenitude be theirs
Who looked above!"

The world with all its joy and achievement — that world which he is still to have — was but the needful furniture for life's first stage. The very love to

which he turns to wrest escape from the hideous completeness that he has purchased for himself was all around him in the world, though he did not see it, when he made his wretched choice. And so he flings away his hopeless riches, his painful joy, his ignominious contentment. He is a man, and not a thing.

"I cowered deprecatingly—
'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be— leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
Let that old life seem mine— no more—
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress;
Be all the earth a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon,
To reach one eve the Better Land!'"

And when the vision leaves him, he sees life with other eyes than he had ever done before. He is not looking for earth to be heaven. Heaven is still to gain. The enjoyment of uninterrupted ease would not be peace, but sluggishness. Never to be called

on to choose, never to be called on to suffer, never to be called on to submit, would mark with dull completeness what it is his joy to know still to be incomplete. He not only accepts earth's limitations, he welcomes them.

“And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.”

God breathed the breath of life into men's nostrils for higher purposes than that they should browse at will in full-fed vacancy.

It is not strange that a man in whose thought the future occupied so prominent a place should have a personal word to say about it, and Browning's last poem is on just this subject. Do men — he calls them fools — think that death means imprisonment? Will they pity him when they hear that he is dead? He asks no pity, he looks forward to no such state. For who was he, and what?

“One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break;
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
 triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.”

Then there need be no uncertainty about what was
before him.

“No, at noonday in the bustle of man’s work-time
 Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
‘Strive and thrive!’ cry ‘Speed,— fight on, fare ever
 There as here!’”

Across the centuries, the poet joins issue with the
prophet, and declares that the future sanctifies the
present, and that so the present should consecrate
the future, and make it sure.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FORCE OF PERSONALITY

THREE is nothing in the world more powerful, and at the same time more mysterious, than Personality. No work can be done without a worker, but the worker is vastly more important than the work. This force of personality is present in the largest and in the smallest affairs of life. What was the Incarnation but the personality of God as it revealed itself to men? The Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Son of God was found in fashion as a man. He had His friends, and did His work, and lived the life of God on earth. Ideas are ghosts. It takes living and breathing men to deal with men. And so we have that strange, unmapped region which is at once so bright and so dim. We can tell very well what things are, but we cannot tell why they are. The poet disliked Dr. Fell. He could not give the reason, but he was absolutely certain of the fact. If he had liked Dr. Fell, it would have been just as hard to

give a satisfactory explanation of his feeling. We admire virtue, but we must all confess that there are virtuous persons whom we cannot tolerate. We would go half a mile out of our way rather than have two minutes' conversation with them on high subjects. We admire dignitaries, and speak no evil of them. But we would rather stay at home forever than travel with certain dignitaries, of the best reputation in this world, and of whose heavenly calling there could be no doubt whatever. We admire scholarship, but scholarship does not bind heart to heart. Information often becomes tiresome. Back of the virtue there must be something more than virtue, back of the dignity there must be something more than dignity, back of the knowledge there must be something more than knowledge, which shall redeem them from the dulness of mere attributes and give them vital force.

The prophets were well aware of this, when they gazed into the future, and pictured not only the regeneration which they trusted should one day come upon the state, but the Messiah by means of whom the regeneration should be possible. There was Something to be done; but, more than that, there

was Some One who could do it. Side by side with Isaiah's passionate desire for a righteous nation, we find his longing for a righteous man. He looked at Jerusalem, and saw what it was with Ahaz king — a glorious jewel worn by a grinning fool. Then, with that spiritual imagination of his which thick darkness was powerless to destroy, he saw it as it might be, and as it ought to be. A king should reign in righteousness; a king who should be equal to his task. The rioting and drunkenness, the gorgeous clothes that covered rottenness, the days of the city's shame and degradation — these should have an end. As Isaiah looks forward to the time of deliverance, and to the messenger by whom the deliverance should come, we cannot say whether the qualities of man or God predominate. The Deliverer — the Saviour, as we have learned to call Him — should be one of themselves, born in their land, tied to them by the ties of kinship; one whom they had known, and watched over, and helped in his days of helplessness, and loved as only little children can be loved. But he must be one with every royal attribute, wise, and powerful, and able to rule his land. And so, from the court of Ahaz, which was everything that it

ought not to be, there comes Isaiah's picture of the future ruler of the state. Well might such an one be called Immanuel, God with us. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

This figure comes and goes before Isaiah's vision. Sometimes we hear nothing of him for long periods, and then a sudden glimpse is given, which reveals his character, or reminds men of the work which he will have to do. He is of the family of David, a rod out of the stem of Jesse, a gathering place not only for the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah, but for the Gentiles also. Just as in the New Testament St. Paul can speak of Christ as one who breaks down the middle wall of partition between man and man, and who reconciles all difference through His own love, so does the prophet speak of this Messiah in whom he trusts. To a vexed and troubled earth he brings the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Where he goes, the ancient strifes are at an end, and the world is

new. Though he smites with the rod of his mouth; and slays the wicked with the breath of his lips, righteousness and faithfulness are the qualities by which he rules.

At another time, the Messiah is pictured simply as a man, and we see that in the prophet's mind there are no limits to what a man can do. He shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Here we have the force of personality gathered up, and expressed within a single sentence. It means sympathy, the making of troubles easier and burdens lighter. It means fellowship, the putting to flight of loneliness, the bringing in of another's power and of another's help. It means strength, not from within but from without, the strength through which one's own strength grows. It means refreshment, the ability to turn away from that which dries and withers, and to make a fresh start with new life and with new hope. It means affection, that giving of one's self which we are taught is the chief attribute of God, that fostering care with which the father protects his children, and the mother watches over her

young. These are things of which we may read in books, and which have their place in systems of thought and in lists of virtues. But they have no real existence until the time when they are given by men to men.

Thus far we have confined our survey to that portion of Isaiah's book in which the prophet is himself the central figure. From Assyria to Egypt, his watchful gaze takes in the world. He warns, he threatens, he counsels, he pleads, he bears constant witness to the Divine Master who has appointed him his task. With the fortieth chapter, we come to a new time and a new atmosphere. Isaiah himself has long since disappeared. The city which he strove so earnestly to bring to a sense of her opportunities and her responsibilities has been destroyed. The people who, while they had it, valued so lightly what they had, are now in exile, their spirit broken, living only in the future and in the past. "They that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Zion." But they asked what was impossible. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The problems of Isaiah's day have not indeed been

solved, for they were problems which are still to be found in modern states, but the conditions of this new time are such that they no longer press for a solution. There is no need of hurling invective at those who have lost the very means of sinning their old sins, or of trying to break the lawless spirit of those whose hearts are broken.

If our comparison were between Isaiah and Browning considered simply as individuals, these latter chapters of the Book of Isaiah would be quite beyond its scope. But, from a literary point of view, the use of many centuries has stamped Isaiah's name upon them, and has given them a permanent abiding-place within his pages. We know that Isaiah did not write them, but we do not know who did, and so they have always been called by the name which accident, or tradition, or association has bestowed upon them. In their subject-matter, and their structure, and their method, they differ materially from the earlier book. They deal with new times and new conditions. But in their treatment of the force of personality they yield no whit to Isaiah himself, in the days when he was looking for the Messiah who should come. Out of the whole Old Testament, it

is here that the spirit of the New Testament is approached most closely. No doubt, there are critical questions which are perplexing and obscure, but, while the mind may not always be certain of the meaning, the whole passage speaks plainly to the heart. The prophet reminds his people that even in these days of their suffering and their adversity there is still a work for them to do for God. This nation of his, wandering, lonely, stripped of all that went to make up its ancient glory, is still the nation that God chose for Himself from among all the nations of the earth. If the old responsibilities have been taken from them, new responsibilities are set forth to take their place. "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." There is nothing local nor provincial about their task. Rather it brings them into touch with the whole world. Moreover, it is a work so intimate, so personal, that the prophet cannot express himself by speaking of it as belonging only to the state. The state is an individual, a person, with a distinct life of

its own. The figure of the Servant of the Lord, perhaps at first only a personification of the nation, takes on more and more the breath of life, until at last it becomes only less heroic and overpowering than the New Testament figure in which it reaches its fulfilment. If this is an ideal conception, it is a conception which possesses all the qualities which go to make up a living soul. The Lord speaks to this servant of His as a man speaks to his own familiar friend. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Just as Isaiah heard God's call, and straightway offered himself to meet the need, so now the Servant is sent out to do God's work, a work which is described in the very words that by and by were to be used of Jesus Christ. "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." From the very beginning the Servant has been appointed

to this task. "The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name." The Servant can perceive the dignity and honor of his calling. He is quick to hear the voice of God, and with the tongue of the learned, the tongue of one who has been taught and understands, he knows how to speak a word in season to the weary, to bring the peace of God to those who are distressed. He is not to be discouraged nor turned back. Whatever happens, he has set his face like a flint, and though there may be failure in the sight of men, in God's sight he is assured of final victory.

The prophet reaches his climax in that passage which has been read for centuries on Good Friday, and in which the Old Testament seems to pass fairly over into the New. The one thing lacking to this sublime Person is a name. He stands there, and bears his witness to the great things man can do. He shows that character means more than circumstance, that submission is more powerful than conquest, that it is he who is ready to lose his life who saves it, after all. For himself, there is only the most dismal failure. Even those who should have been

his friends were found apart, lending no helping hand. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." But out of all this weakness and this ill-success, he does that service which stands for the image of God in man, and in the possibility of which there lies that human dignity which is only less than the Divine. What does his own rejection matter? It is not in terms of himself that his life can be expressed. "Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." These are the things that man can do for man. And these are the things that none but a living man can do.

There is no region in which the ancient prophet — including not only the patriot who lived in the eighth century before Christ, but Isaiah in the wider literary sense — and our modern poet come closer together than they do just here. The three thousand years that separate them, the countless differences of environment and circumstance, become as nothing

when viewed from the standpoint of their common realization of the worth of man. This is a key-note of Browning's writing. Even if he is engaged only in putting some abstruse system of philosophy into metrical form, it seldom happens that there is not some man, sharply defined and clearly individualized, out of whose mouth comes whatever there may be of speculation or opinion. These are Ferishtah's Fancies, not mere abstract thought. There is no poet but Shakespeare who deals so constantly with persons. To one of his volumes he gave the title "Men and Women." He is "human at the red-ripe of the heart."

The emphasis which Browning lays upon personality is everywhere implicit in his work. It is present so constantly that it is hard to isolate it, to perceive it more in one place than another. We have seen already something of the vigor with which he portrays Guido, and Pompilia, and Caponsacchi. These are no shadows, they are flesh and blood. "The Ring and the Book" is something more than literature; it is Rome. We hear the crowd as it surges through the streets. We see the many types from which any multitude must be made up. We be-

come impatient at their half-understanding, their half knowledge, "so universal is their plague of squint." These people who have no names, who emerge but for a moment from the throng and then are lost again, are yet instinct with life. There is

"some man of quality
Who — breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist —
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase
'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole:
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word —
How Quality dissertated on the case."

This is one group, and there are many other groups who say their say, with varying emphasis, with opposite prejudices, from very different points of view. Although the subject of the poem is the tragedy of Pompilia, there is scarcely a corner of the city which it does not touch. The reader feels that

the Rome of 1698 is almost as real to him as the town in which he lives, and that these people who come and go in the poet's pages are his own acquaintances and neighbors. Perhaps the incidental and minor characters are the most vivid, because they are less directly connected with a theme which, in itself, must seem strange and far away. But the more prominent personages are also sharply individualized. There is no possibility, for example, of confusing the two lawyers, for all the likeness that the practice of the same profession might suggest. It is true, there is an absurdity about them both, and a venality, and a low professionalism, which puts their own advantage above truth and justice. But they are quite distinct. On the one side is Master Hyacinth de Archangelis, whose duty it is to make Guido's defence. He has no interest in Guido; he knows him guilty; but, for the glory that it will bring himself, he would like to get the culprit off. He shows marvellous ingenuity in making the worse appear the better reason. The bloodthirsty cut-throats whom Guido had hired to help him in his crime the advocate represents as simple-minded innocents who bore no envy, hate, malice, nor un-

charitableness against the people they had put to death, but who practiced murder only as a pleasant means by which they might turn an honest penny. When Guido himself refused to give their miserable wages to these poor wretches, Master Hyacinth sees in this only the token of a lofty spirit which would not vulgarize vengeance by mixing it with mercenary motives, and which essays a gentle missionary work with the accomplices by sparing them the pollution of the pay. He devotes himself in a desultory manner to the preparation of his case, and the way in which it is to be presented to the Pope.

"It's hard; you have to plead before these priests
And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass
For heathen and, what's worse, for ignorant
O' the quality o' the court and what it likes
By way of illustration of the law.
To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,
And, having first ecclesiasticized,
Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
Giving my Fisc his finish. There 's my speech!"

But, even while he works, his thought is not of Guido nor of Pompilia, but of the family dinner which is to be served presently, and of the little son

who comes that day to eight years old, and whom he apostrophizes under a bewildering confusion of pet names.

On the other side is Doctor Bottinius, the Fiscal Advocate, whose business it is to prove Guido guilty — no hard task. He is no less a scoundrel than his opponent, without the redeeming kindness of domesticity. His interest is solely in himself. If he could only read his speech instead of printing it! If the scurvy courtroom could be turned into an immense hall, with fifty judges sitting in a row to praise his eloquence! He would rise, and bend, and look about, consciously unconscious, while the multitude waited breathlessly for him to begin! We long for Hyacinth and his lambs' fries and the little Cinoncello. They are far better than this man with his dull conceit, his labored classicism, his far-fetched similes that have no point, his studied search for some low motive, his garish self-importance. The thing which he had to do was plain enough, but he plunges and tramples until the straight road becomes a quagmire. The Pompilia whom he describes is not the Pompilia who tells her pitiful story, and whose innocence and purity can

turn Caponsacchi from a weak priest into a strong man. She is an imaginary creation of a man who measures all things by his own low standards, for whom the whole world is smirched and yellowed because he can only see it through his blinking eyes. Bottinius is like those travelling evangelists who set out to prove the inspiration of the Scripture, which needs no proof, and who bring to their superfluous task such grotesque statements, such impossible interpretations, such unnatural sequences, such palpable contradictions, that their astounded hearers are sorely tempted to escape from the confusion by turning atheists at once. Bottinius prosecutes Guido, but it is the prosecutor who almost succeeds in making him seem innocent.

If these precious specimens should move us to think too unkindly of our kind, over against them is set the majestic figure,

“Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God.”

This is the man to whom the case must come for final adjudication. He pays no heed to the cunning

compliments by which the opposing counsel seek to distract his attention from the point at issue. He brushes aside the pitfalls of irrelevant evidence which they prepare, and goes straight to the very root of things. He has no mind for sentimental pity, nor for a mercy which should lend encouragement to crime. He recognizes the responsibility of judgment; his own judgment cannot be far away. He goes over all the papers in the case, and then he takes the actors in it under consideration, and reads their souls. There is nothing here of the silly gossip of the street-corner, or of the blundering evasion of the hired counsel who have no care except for gain or glory. The old man knows the world. Though he is priest and Pope, he is not out of touch with human nature. He speaks of an infant's birth, and the spirit in which it should be met.

“Men cut free their souls
From care in such a case, fly up in thanks
To God, reach, recognize His love for once.”

He hears Pompilia's story from the beginning, and knows that it must be true because she tells it, just as he knows that a man like Guido must be all false.

“First of the first,
 Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
 Perfect in whiteness; stoop thou down, my child,
 Give one good moment to the poor old Pope,
 Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—
 Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
 Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb,
 Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
 Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
 The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
 Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth’s flower
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!”

The judgment which he makes, though it must be made with his own powers and with the human possibility of error, is in God’s sight, and, humanly speaking, in God’s place.

“Under Thy measureless, my atom width!”

But he does not hesitate.

“I stand here, not off the stage though close
 On the exit: and my last act, as my first,
 I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus

With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
With my whole strength once more, ere end my part,
Ending, so far as man may, this offence."

There could be no more characteristic saying. The Pope is no abstraction, but a man who is alive from head to foot.

There is hardly one of Browning's poems about which something of this sort could not be said. Fifine is real. Balaustion is real. Pippa is real. So is Filippo Baldinucci, as he sits in bloodthirsty orthodoxy and mourns the time when Jews could be pelted with impunity, and kicked and cursed to the glory of God and to one's heart's content. So is the Lost Leader, with the breaking of faith and the severing of service.

"Life's night begins; let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation, and pain,
Forced praise on our part — the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!"

So is the little Lippo Lippi, as he describes the manner in which he came to be a monk.

"I was a baby when my mother died,
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two,

On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds, and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew),
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
'So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time—
'To quit this very miserable world?
Will you renounce' . . . 'the mouthful of bread?' thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to— all at eight years old!"

These are only a few of the multitude of men and women to whom the poet's creative imagination has given life.

But Browning does more than fill his poems with persons. Like the old prophets, he shows what personality can do. Perhaps the most striking illustration is to be found in "Saul," when David comes to the king and tries to arouse him from his fit of dumb

madness. For three days not a sound of prayer nor of praise has come from the tent where Saul and the Spirit are contending in mortal strife. Then David prays, and prays again, and takes his harp, and goes into the darkness.

“Here is David, thy servant!”

One after another he plays the tunes to which Saul has been accustomed, which might turn the tortured mind in some new direction, and relieve the tense nerves and over-wrought brain — the song which brings the sheep back to the fold at night, the song to which the crickets listen, and the quails, and the jerboas in the desert, the help-tune of the reapers, their wine-song when “eye lights eye in good friendship,” the dirge when the dead man is borne to his last resting-place, the marriage chant, the processional hymn which the Levites sing as they go up to the altar. Then, at the very first token that Saul hears, David breaks forth into the praise of life.

“Oh, our manhood’s prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing, nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living, the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver
shock

Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold-dust
divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of
wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!"

It was music which was having its effect on Saul, but it was music which no one but David could have made. He goes on to sing of Saul's early years, his father's sword, his mother's blessing, his comrades, his honors, his responsibilities. Then, little by little, Saul comes back from that region of desolation and unrest in which his soul had been astray. He rouses himself, and listens, and knows the difference between death and life. What more can David do to help him? He can only give himself. There come back to him fancies which he had first known in the pasture, when his sheep fed around him in silence, and a solitary eagle floated above him in the heavens. He speaks of these, the schemes of life which he had evolved in those old days, its best rules and right

uses, the courage which makes it worth while, and the prudence which keeps safely what is worth the keeping. Saul listens more and more.

“He slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly.”

He smooths his disheveled hair, and wipes away the huge sweat that bathes his countenance, and girds his loins, and feels for the precious armlets that he was used to wear.

“He is Saul, ye remember in glory,— ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though
much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did
choose
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite
lose!”

He has come to himself; and he has come to himself through David, and through David's love. And David knows this, and presently he knows what it implies. Saul must begin anew, and what assurance is there of his success? He is a failure, a mistake, a ruin. It is something that he realizes this, but salvation, and redemption, and restoration are yet

to gain. Where may they come from? Then David sees the sum of the whole matter.

“Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, who yet alone
can?”

What David has done is but an earnest of what God will do.

“See the King — I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would, knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect; Oh, speak through me
now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou — so
wilt thou!”

The personality of men derives its significance and power from the Infinite Personality of God; and what man does, by himself, becomes as nothing compared with what he would do, with God for his ally.

It is not often that Browning speaks of himself. He tells us that he is an artist, and not a public show. He declares that if Shakespeare used the sonnet as a key with which to unlock his heart be-

fore the world, he were the less Shakespeare for that very reason. The highest personality implies reserve. But now and then he lays aside this reticence, and speaks, not for his creatures, but for himself. We have seen the personal faith which animated Paracelsus, except for Pauline the poet's earliest character, and which stayed with Browning until the "Epilogue" completed his life's work. There are three or four times when that faith is added to hope and love, and made his own direct confession. He often tells us what soul has done for soul, but in these rare instances we know what it is that his own soul has gained. We find it in "By the Fireside." There is the fresh Italian landscape, the Apennines, the little lake, the yellow mountain-flowers, the creeper's leaf dashed with a splash of crimson, the stone bridge and chapel, the lichens and the hemp-stalks and the ivy, the bird that sings there all through the long day, and the stray sheep that comes to the pond to drink. But it is the human companionship that gives the place its meaning.

"My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for?"

And so he reviews the years that they have spent together. One scene after another takes memory by storm, and is for a little while as if it were of the very substance of eternity.

“Oh moment, one and infinite!
The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The West is tender, hardly bright:
How gray at once is the evening grown—
One star, its chrysolite.”

There are many recollections, and as he reconstructs the past he comes to see what it is that has made his life complete, and has given to nature to gain her best from him. He is

“One born to love you, sweet!”

But the past implies the future. What of the years to come?

“Think, when our one soul understands,
The great Word which made all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

“Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine!”

The influence of one loving human heart upon another is nothing less than this. If it begins on earth, it cannot reach its end except in heaven.

Something of the same sort we find again in “One Word More,” the dedication with which he offers the volume called “Men and Women” to his wife. It is in praise of that innermost expression of one’s self which the world cannot know, nor even guess at, but which is reserved as the possession, choice from its very rareness, of the one best loved. Raphael painted his pictures for the world to see, but for one only he made a century of sonnets, which no other eyes might read. Dante once set out to paint an angel upon which none but Beatrice should ever look, but presently there broke in upon him “certain people of importance,” noisy and bustling and tiresome, as people of importance are so apt to be—and he stopped. He could write the Divine Comedy in spite of them, but this other work of his they

spoiled. It is so with our own poet. He has something to give the world, but he has something else to give to the one who is more than all the world to him.

“God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!”

And it is this second side which marks that separateness, that impossibility of being ever merged in any class or kind, of which the apostle speaks when he tells of the new name which shall be written, which no man knows save he who receives it.

“Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.”

When Mrs. Browning died, the poet, as we should have expected, made small sign. His wound was too deep for the world to gaze at. But while he never asks for sympathy, and while pity could only be an

insult, twice at least he speaks in such a way that he who has ears to hear can understand. Once is in "Prospice." Does he fear death? Not he.

"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!"

The other time is at the beginning of "The Ring and the Book," his greatest work. He has marked out the paths by which his readers are to go, and now the story stretches away before them. But first —

"Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither, where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,

Their utmost up and on,— so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness, which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!"

The story takes us often into regions where base desires and mean passions have their dwelling. If now and then it rises to the heights, there are many times when it drags through the depths, or bumps painfully about among the shallows of our humanity. But this introduction reaches through the whole. It adds to the poem something that could not have been imparted in any other way. In its own degree, it helps us to understand the feeling that must have come to Moses when he heard the voice speaking to him out of the midst of the bush, and saying—“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

We have seen that Isaiah's conception of personality could be compressed into a single sentence. Browning's conception of it may be found complete in one of his very briefest poems. There is no direct allusion, but we know what he means. Without it, and with it— we may perceive the difference.

“Such a starved bank of moss !

Till, that May morn,

Blue ran the flash across;

Violets were born !

“Sky— what a scowl of cloud !

Till, near and far,

Ray on ray split the shroud;

Splendid, a star !

“World— how it walled about

Life with disgrace !

Till God’s own smile came out:

That was thy face !”

It is the teaching of St. John in the New Testament that the Word of God was with the Father in the beginning, and from all eternity. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. Speaking at another time, and in a somewhat different way, he declares that he that hath the Son hath life, and that he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. The apostle is only repeating his Master’s teaching. Christ Himself spoke of Himself as the Resurrection and the Life; as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; as one who had come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly; as the

Vine of which the disciples were the branches, and apart from which they could do nothing. This fulness of life in Jesus Christ, which He imparts to men in such large measure, men must share with those who are closest to them as best they may. No knowledge, no thought, no table of the Law can take its place. It is the one thing in the world in which the image of God upon us bears no counterfeit. The prophets learned this when God spake to them at sundry times and in divers manners. The poets learned it when they made themselves the spokesmen for their fellow-men, and spoke to God of all that is in man's heart. It is in personality that life consists; not in the abundance of the things that a man possesseth, but in what he is. This is what Isaiah meant when he said that a man should be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest. This is what Browning meant when, in the face of one whom he loved, he saw God's smile.

CHAPTER IX

THE BESETTING GOD

WE have followed Isaiah and Browning through various regions in which they have been equally at home. There are of course great divergences between them, not only such as would be inevitable from the fact that one is a poet and the other a prophet, but also of a deeper and more thoroughgoing sort. It would be impossible to find in Isaiah anything at all approaching to Browning's lighter moods, or to the subtleties of philosophical speculation in which he was sometimes led to bury his poetic gift. It would be impossible to find in Browning anything that should correspond to Isaiah's keen sense of personal responsibility for the condition of the nation, or to the watchful anxiety with which he kept himself always in the very thick of things. Isaiah was as little of an artist as Browning of a statesman. Isaiah lavished upon his own Jerusalem that passionate affection — fervent with all the fervor of the burning East — which Browning, in more temperate fashion, be-

stowed, not upon his own land, but upon his adopted Italy. For Isaiah the stage direction must always be To-day and Here. For Browning it might be At Any Time and Anywhere. But in many ways the two are strangely and strikingly alike; temperamentally, in their energy, their human interest, their breadth and clarity of view; and in the very subject-matter of their thought, as, each in his own way and with his own background, they speak of the good which God can wrest from evil, of that spark of the Divine in man which cannot be destroyed, of the future and all that it may hold of hope and promise, and of that power of personality which gives to the weakest man a force which no abstract idea could ever have. It remains to consider that meeting-ground of thought which gives significance to all their other likenesses, that recognition of God as the Lord and Giver of life, no absentee, but a Dweller and Worker in His own world, without which Isaiah could not have been a prophet, nor Browning a great religious poet.

It is a commonplace of prophecy that God is the foundation upon which its work is built. Even the false prophets hide their falseness behind His name,

and try to clothe their lying words with the semblance of His approval. The great prophets of the Old Testament have their own methods of setting forth this truth. To Jeremiah God is, at least to some extent, a Taskmaster. He would keep silent, but God compels his speech. He would turn aside from troubling men's souls, but God calls him back again, and he cannot hold his peace. To Ezekiel God is the Vision of a great glory. He wanders by the river Chebar, forlorn, disconsolate, distressed. He would lift up his eyes to the hills from whence comes strength, but the flat lands of Babylon are all about him. Then, into the dreariness of his exile, there comes the whirlwind, and the great cloud, and the fire, the appearance of living creatures, and the throne like sapphire, and the likeness of One that sat upon the throne. Ezekiel is young and vigorous, trained to serve the state, full of the zeal that ought to be — even though there are many times when it is not — the constant companion of privilege, and of love for his fatherland. At the very outset of his career, every door of opportunity is closed against him. Like the older prophets, he would have given himself for Jerusalem, to live for her, to suffer for

her, to die for her; but he is torn from his home, and set to eat his heart out in a dull heathen village. Whether it is well or ill with Jerusalem he can learn only from some casual messenger. If good comes, he can have no share in it; and if evil befalls, he cannot even have the satisfaction of knowing the worst. But, while he is so shut out from earth, the heavens are opened to him. If he may not dwell in the Holy City, God will be with him where he is. And so we have those dazzling descriptions of the Divine glory which surpass those of any other prophet, and that elaborate account of the Temple, which he could think about, even though he might not serve in it.

But to Isaiah God is more than a Taskmaster or a Heavenly Vision. If we may say it reverently, the prophet thinks of Him as a Fellow-Worker, an Ally. "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." In these two sentences we have the whole story of the prophet's life. All else is a mere matter of detail. He recognizes his own unworthiness. The coal from the altar must be laid upon his mouth, and touch his lips, that it may take

away his sin. But God's worthiness covers those who do God's work.

The whole Book of Isaiah is the assertion, in one form and another, that God is present in His world, as One who cares, and watches, and forbears, and hopes. The Psalmist's words would furnish a suitable motto for it. "Thou art about my path and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." This is an adequate description of the spirit in which Isaiah does his work. If he speaks of the sins of his people, it is because, in committing them, they have failed in their duty towards God. If he looks for the Messiah who should come, it is because he comes to establish God's kingdom upon earth. His own call is the commission which God has given him for that war in which there is no discharge. This is implied in every smallest portion of the ground which we have already covered — Assyria is a tool which God holds in His hand and compels to do His work; the

remnant which must return bears constant witness to the fact that the image of God in man can never be altogether blotted out; the future is God's harvest time; man's strength is but an indication and a suggestion of what God's strength must be. When the prophet mounts his watch-tower and looks about him over the world, it is because he knows that it is still God's world, even though it lies in wickedness. God is a devouring fire which shall burn up the chaff, but as for him that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly, that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high with God. As a lion clings to its prey and will not let it go, though a mob of shepherds lift voice and hand against him, so God cannot be driven from the people whom He has chosen, not to destroy them like the lion, but to cherish and protect. As a mother-bird hovers over her nest, so God watches over Jerusalem to cover and deliver it. In the whole Book of Esther the name of God is not once used. But in the Book of Isaiah there is hardly a sentence where it is not at least implied.

There are many differences between the two parts of the Book of Isaiah, but in passing from the first to the second, so far as the recognition of God's controlling presence in the world is concerned, if there is any difference it is only in the direction of greater intensity. In the earlier chapters, Isaiah is God's fellow-worker; but in the later chapters the very namelessness of the prophet who writes in exile does but emphasize the fact that God is all, and in all. In a few sentences at the beginning the prophet sets forth what he is to say over and over again in different ways. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." This is the burden that is laid upon him. It is his God who speaks, and they are God's people to whom he must go. They have been desolate. Now God is coming back to them. "Speak ye home to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

The prophet bears his message — a Gospel before the Gospel's day. It is not something to be heard quietly, and without emotion. It must quicken the pulses and stir the blood. Jerusalem is in ruins, but

no matter; the dawn of better things is already close at hand. "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" His presence means His help and guidance. They are to go back, but it is an army in which there is little martial strength. But God has all that they lack. "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." And not only is God the Leader of their expedition, but He is the Protector of those who are weak, and helpless, and unfitted for the effort that must be made. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." So presently the prophet sums up his message in a question and in a comprehensive statement.

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. He

giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

It would be hard to put all that God is and all that God does in a plainer and stronger way. In time — from the beginning; in space — to the ends of the earth; in knowledge, beyond knowledge. With men, He can inspire them with the enthusiasm which leads to extraordinary things; or He can go with them on the forced marches which every soldier is called upon, now and then, to take, and for which he needs all his reserve of strength and will; or He can walk with them, day by day, along the common roads of life. Whether they soar, or run, or walk, God is the companion of those who wait upon Him.

The succeeding chapters are an elaboration of this theme. Israel is God’s people, the Servant is the Servant of the Lord, Cyrus is God’s chosen one

to bring about a great deliverance, the idols at which the prophet hurls his withering sarcasm are God's adversaries. We hear God speaking of Himself with a positiveness which suggests nothing but the certainty of Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God. Do His people need Him? There is nothing that He cannot do to help. "I am the Lord: That is my name; and my glory will I not give to another." He is the first and the last, the Creator of Israel, their Holy One, their King. "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed when there was no strange god among you; therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand; I will work, and who shall let it."

This is God's word to Israel, but beyond Israel there are those others with whom no such binding covenant had been made. There were those in Israel, of course, who would have thrust them out, or would at least have kept them at an immeasurable distance. The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, was not for them. But not our prophet. He

hears their cry, and puts it into words. "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." Wherever men long for Him, there God will be. This is the one condition of the invitation that is given. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Israel itself is glorified the more because of the nations who come to it, not for its own sake nor for their sakes, but because of the Lord who is its God. The prophecy is full of climaxes, but perhaps the climax of them all is to be found in that sublime chapter in which Israel is called upon to take its old privilege once more, that it may do God's work, not only in the new Jerusalem, but in all the world. We read it as a hymn of comfort and inspiration, but it is just as much a hymn of praise. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." It makes no difference what there may be without, in the way of obstacle or hindrance; God is with them, and that is enough. "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord

shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee." This glory shows itself in their new strength, and in an attractive power which they never had before; the Gentiles coming to their light, and kings to the brightness of their rising. It is a picture which is in startling contrast to their present low estate. "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee."

The picture is enlarged and amplified. We see the camels of the desert, and the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah. Sheba sends her treasures, and Kedar her flocks. As doves to their windows, or as clouds upon a summer's day, men come from the isles and from the ends of the earth to the name of the Lord their God, and to the Holy One of Israel. The sons of strangers will build up the city walls, and those who despised her will bow themselves down in her, knowing that she is indeed the

city of the Lord. The prophet finds that words are scarcely equal to the glory which he would describe.

“Violence shall be no more heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

It is a magnificent picture of the restoration that should come to Jerusalem. But it is also a picture of the power and glory of Almighty God.

This perception of God immanent in the world is of course of the very air in which prophecy was born. It is prophecy’s chief subject; indeed, there could be no prophecy without it. With poetry it is otherwise. While it is of the very nature of prophecy that it must begin with God, poetry begins with man, and works upward and outward along the many roads by which the mind of man is wont to travel. There is much poetry, and even much

noble poetry, in which there is no word of God at all; but sooner or later a poet of the first magnitude must speak of Him. Apart from God, he cannot deal with the depths of man's soul, or with the mountain-summits of man's mind. It is so with Browning. He has many subjects, and he speaks in many tones. Sometimes he is trivial; a carping critic might even be disposed to call him trifling. Often he is so engrossed with the men and women whom he has created that we see them only at the moment of the poem's action, and are given no opportunity for any further thought about them. Often, as we have seen many times in previous chapters, God is implicit in his work, a Character without whom the drama could not go on, away from whom the whole scene would be unintelligible. The old Grammarian would be a caricature apart from God. So would the man who sought to escape the tyrant, and who found sudden safety when he prayed. So would the Pope. So would David, as he brought new life back to Saul.

But while God holds no such commanding pre-eminence in Browning's thought as He must of necessity have done with Isaiah and with the later

Prophet of the Exile, there are times when He is not only the explanation and the justification of the poet's characters, but when He is Himself the poet's chief subject. We need not call again upon the witness that is borne to Him in "Christmas Eve," and "Easter Day." Most of the poems which have been already quoted in other connections might find an equally appropriate place in our present comparison. Thus, in the case of Johannes Agricola, we have a study in colossal selfishness. He cares not a whit what may happen to the rest of the world so long as he is safe. Their very misfortunes serve to set forth his happiness the more by contrast. But it is a strange sort of selfishness, a selfishness consecrated, as it were, and sanctified — the more hideous for that reason, but also the more impressive, in that it shows how men are wont to call vice virtue, and how they seek to bring God into connection even with their sins. The monk's meditation turns presently into a cold-blooded picture of souls in hell, but what could be more religious than the way in which it opens!

"There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;

No suns and moons though e'er so bright
 Avail to stop me; splendor-proof
 I keep the broods of stars aloof;
For I intend to get to God,
 For 't is to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
 Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
 I lay my spirit down at last."

God is made the foundation, even though the structure that is built upon Him is one which cannot stand.

With the Grammarian, God is the subject of no such travesty. His aim is, not an impossible salvation for a withered soul, but a fulness of knowledge for which life gives the opportunity. He would love God, not only with heart and soul and strength, but with all his mind — a portion of our Lord's commandment which many home-made systems of religion have ignored. But it is one of those things which marks the difference between greatness and littleness, between heroism and the commonplace.

"That low man seeks a little thing to do,
 Sees it and does it:

This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.

That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:

This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

That, has the world here — should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!

This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find Him."

He cannot be content unless he shall gain the very most from life, and he knows that he cannot gain the most without seeking the Highest and trusting in the Best.

There is a method of confessing God which virtually amounts to a denial of Him. It is that attitude towards Him which Arthur Hugh Clough satirizes in his withering version of the Decalogue made easy.

"Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?"

The same thing is described in a clever couplet.

"They did not abolish the gods but they sent them well out of
the way,
With the rarest of nectar to drink, and blue fields of nothing
to sway."

There is nothing of this sort with Browning. Even when he does not name God's name, God is the background against which he thinks his thoughts. It is the soul's world, not the worm's world, which he seeks, in which he believes, and of whose final triumph, amid whatever strifes and storms, he is always certain.

“I have faith such end shall be;
From the first, Power was — I knew;
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view
Love were as plain to see.

“When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.”

This is an old man's deliberate judgment upon the facts of life. He is content to leave much unexplained. He is more than content to leave many things unperfected. But Power and Love — what do they spell but God? And these remain when all those things that can be shaken have been destroyed.

While Browning's literary style is essentially his own, he lets his characters speak for themselves, and not for him. They live in their own times, they are bound by their own conditions, they do not appear as anachronisms or exotics upon the scene. They have their own point of view, and are never mere puppets in a master's hand. But, in a long succession of poems, this point of view is one which makes much of God. With whatever type of character the poet deals, he is always "sure that God observes"; and he is sure, too, that God is observed, even by those who would be glad to close their eyes against Him. Guido cannot escape from Him. Caliban is forced to speculate about Him, albeit it must be in a crude, misshapen way, commensurate with his distorted form and twisted nature. Hohenstiel Schwangau believes that God grants to each new man

"Inter-communication with Himself,
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude."

Francis Furini, the painter-poet, sees token of His presence in the human form.

"Acquaint you with the body ere your eyes
Look upward: this Andromeda of mine—

Gaze on the beauty, Art hangs out for sign
There's finer entertainment underneath.
Learn how they ministrant to life and death—
Those incommensurably marvellous
Contrivances which furnish forth the house
Where soul has sway! Though Master keep aloof,
Signs of His presence multiply from roof
To basement of the building."

Luria the Moor prefers his own land to Florence;
and in the praise of his own land he praises God.

"My own East!
How nearer God we were! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours!
We feel Him, nor by painful reason know!
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there: now it is, as it was then;
All changes at His instantaneous will,
Not by the operation of a law
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work."

Karshish, the Arab physician, is "not incurious in God's handiwork." He has traveled to Jerusalem, and many strange things were brought within the range of his experience. There were rumors through-

out the country-side of Vespasian's coming. In the wilderness,

“A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear.”

He has had the opportunity of observing new diseases, and he has heard of new remedies which he will discuss with his friend Abib when they meet again. Meanwhile, he has talked with Lazarus, and has heard from Lazarus' own lips the story of his friendship with Jesus Christ and of his raising from the dead. He doubts the tale, of course, and scoffs at it. He apologizes to Abib for writing to him of such trivial matters, when he might be telling of blue-flowering borage, and other things important to their profession. But even while he makes light of the story, he cannot get away from it. If Lazarus is a deceiver,

“Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?”

If Lazarus is mad, his madness is of a most uncommon kind; it does not disquiet, but steadies and strengthens him. That God should dwell on earth in fashion as a man, and heal the sick, and raise the dead to life — it altogether passes comprehension. But if Karshish cannot quite believe

it, he pays it at least the tribute of wonder and amazement.

“The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, ‘O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor may’st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!’
The madman saith He said so; it is strange.”

These are a few of the men, of all sorts and of all conditions, who testify to God in Browning’s pages. Not many of his poems could properly be called religious poems, but they are as much more religious than many professedly religious poems as a godly layman is better than an ignorant and careless priest. They wear no ecclesiastical clothing, but God is at their heart. This taking of God for granted, without argument and without apology, does but add to the impression that is produced of the inevitableness of His presence in the world. When Browning goes into metaphysics, while he is subtle and ingenious, we must feel that some-

thing of his power has been lost. Mere probability can never take the place of knowledge; and guesses at truth are a poor substitute for Truth itself, of which we are so certain that it does not need to be explained.

But now and then, apart from "Christmas Eve," and "Easter Day," and "Saul," and "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and the magnificent faith of Pompilia and the Pope, Browning deals with a subject which is distinctly religious from the start. In "La Saisiaz" he asks those deep questions about life and immortality which are suggested by the sudden death of a friend, with whom, on the very next day, he had planned to climb the mountain. He makes the ascent alone.

"Dared and done; at last I stand upon the summit, Dear and True!

Singly dared and done: the climbing both of us were bound to do.

Petty feat and yet prodigious: every side my glance was bent
O'er the grandeur and the beauty lavished through the whole
ascent.

Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and now
immense:

Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in
evidence!"

Amid the stillness and the solitude of those Alpine peaks, God seems very near. The poem itself is argument rather than assertion. Not to every question is there an answer. Not for every hope can there be proof. But while there cannot be certainty on every point, while there is room for doubt, while many a problem must go for a while unsolved, this at any rate the poet would have men say of him.

“Well? Why he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God!”

This is his Holy of Holies into which no doubt can come.

Very different from “La Saisiaz,” but like it in the thorough-goingness of its religious motive, is “A Death in the Desert,” in which Browning portrays the last hours of St. John. There is a powerful contrast between the bleakness of the physical, and the splendor of the spiritual world. The old man lies in a cave amongst the rocks, while four disciples watch his breath grow faint and fainter. At any moment there may be rude interruption. Thieves are abroad, and persecutors, and wild

beasts. By the mouth of the cave, one of the little group keeps watch, under pretence of grazing a goat on rags of various herb which the rocks' shade just keeps alive.

“Outside, the Bactrian cried his cry,
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
As signal we were safe, from time to time.”

Then the sick man speaks. He is not conscious of his weakness. He is not conscious of the dreariness of his surroundings.

“What do I
See now, suppose you, there where you see rock
Round us?”

He goes back to the time when he was young, when he had first known Jesus Christ.

“Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,
I went for many years about the world,
Saying— ‘It was so; so I heard and saw.’”

Now things are changed. There is need of something more than testimony. There is need of something more than miracle.

“I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
This imports solely, man should mount on each
New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,
The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,
Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.”

So, though John dies, and though John be the last man left on earth who has seen, and touched, and handled the Word of Life, it does not matter. There is no further need for seeing of that sort.

“I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.”

Life gives to man his chance of the prize of learning love. It gives him too—and to most of us, with our sins, and failures, and temptations, and mistakes, the thought must be an eternally blessed one—the chance of coming to know that he is not complete, that he

“partly is and wholly hopes to be.”

The disciple would say this; and if there be anything more that he could say wherein his struggling

brothers need a hand he would linger to say it though he must tarry a new hundred years. But he was dead.

“Believe ye will not see him any more
About the world with his divine regard!
For all was as I say, and now the man
Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.”

Browning was writing poetry for almost sixty years. Few men have had so wide a range of subjects, or have produced so great a mass of work. But there is scarcely one of his important poems in which, under one aspect or another, God is not present, not as a mere name, but as One who is needed to complete the sense. When Browning wrote “Paracelsus” he was twenty-three. When he wrote the “Reverie” and the “Epilogue” he was little short of eighty. But in them all there is the same God-consciousness which he possesses above all our other poets. He began with it. Paracelsus goes forth upon his quest because he would not “reject God’s great commission.” He is sure that God

“Ne’er dooms to waste the strength that He imparts!”

In completed man he sees begin anew a tendency towards God. This Godward look Browning retains when his genius reaches its high-water mark in "The Ring and the Book." A sordid story is made to issue in splendid sacrifice, a cowardly crime brings us presently to the Pope, one of the noblest figures in our literature. What Pompilia, as she lies dying, says of her child, the little life that must be left all by itself, shows us the manner in which Browning was wont to think of God.

"Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier; if my babe
Outlived the hour — and he has lived two weeks —
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
Why should I doubt He will explain in time
What I feel now, but fail to find the words?
My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all —

Only his mother's, born of love not hate!
So shall I have my rights in after-time.
It seems absurd, impossible to-day;
So seems so much else, not explained but known!"

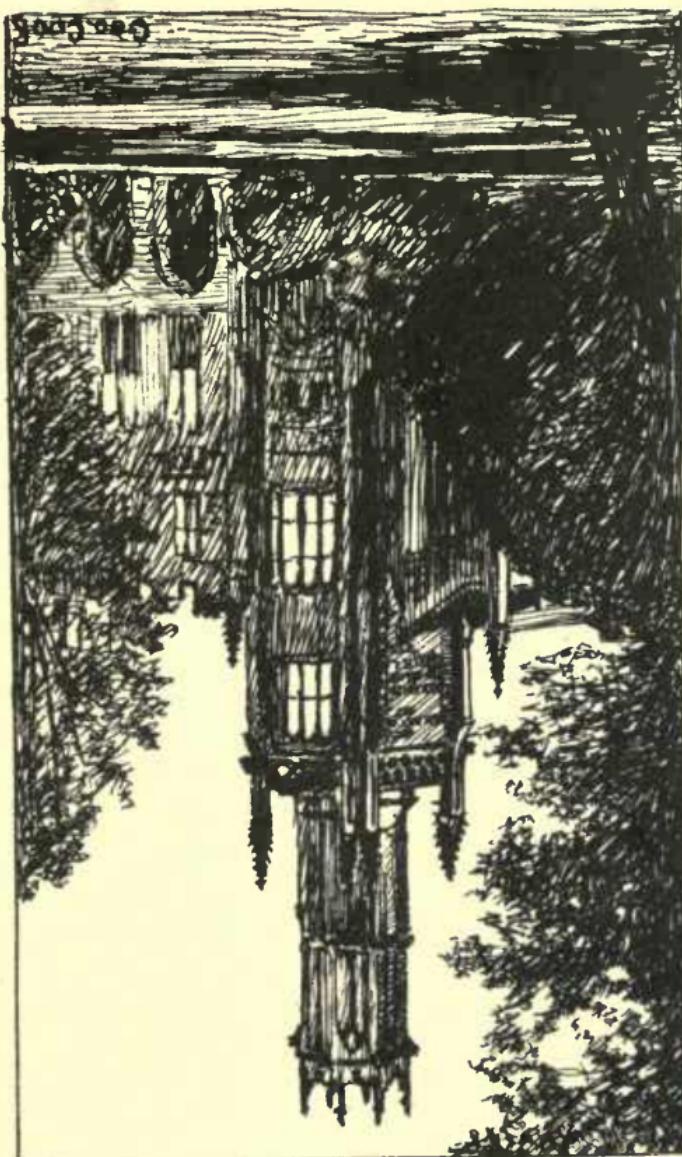
This is Browning's constant attitude — things must be left with God. When, now and then, he essays to explain, he becomes very much like other people. But when he tells of what he sees and knows, he lifts us to the loftiest regions of the soul.

We have traced the parallelism between Isaiah and Browning in many ways. Their own words speak for them, and show how close it is. In part, no doubt, it is due to the towering stature of them both. Aside from the commonest experiences of universal humanity, there would be little enough to connect the Hebrew of the eighth century before Christ with the Englishman of the nineteenth century of the Christian era; but as men climb the mountain they must draw near each other, and when one passes above Isaiah or above Browning there is not far to go. In part, again, their likeness is due to the intense religious nature of them both. Whatever may be the differences that keep men apart, God does not change, and those who are

concerned with Him possess a common meeting-ground which distance of place and time, or peculiarities of race and environment, or the multitudinous conditions which come and go as the world goes on its way, are powerless to destroy. But more than all we may account for the closeness of their thought from the fact that each, from his own high place, looks over towards the other's station. Prophecy has a sanction to which the very highest poetry makes no claim. But when John Keble spoke of the poets as "heirs of more than royal race," he spoke well. They show us the power of the mind, the reach of the loving heart, the depths of the awakened soul. They point out an avenue of escape from those sordid cares, those petty half-interests, those besetting trifles, of which none of us are without experience. There is nothing more real than those things with which the noblest poetry deals. It shows us, not from without but from within, not as a monitor but as a loving counsellor, what we might be, what we ought to be. It does its work of renewal and refreshing in the soul when the fire and the earthquake and the whirlwind might come and go in vain. It tinges the clouds

that gather about life with an unearthly glory. It makes humanity nobler, our friends dearer, our joys keener, our griefs more sacred. It even seems as if it made God nearer than He was before. Prophecy speaks often with a sterner and more insistent voice. It has the right, not only to speak to men of God, but to speak for God. It stirs the conscience, as poetry moves the heart. While Isaiah was the greatest of the prophets, more than any of his fellow-prophets he was a poet; and while Browning was a poet of the first order, the prophetic spirit is constantly present in his work.

uđo oře glosuđa



glosuđa

